

Toaru Majutsu no Index 16

From the dark side of the Roman Catholic Church, Acqua of the Back of “God’s Right Seat” had finally started to move. Having both the power of a “Saint” and the “unique characteristics” of “God’s Right Seat”, that strongest, most vile enemy had trespassed the boundaries of Academy City as he aims at the “right hand” of Kamijou Touma.

Having received Acqua’s proclamation, the Anglican Church had despatched Itsuwa of the Amakusa Catholics as a bodyguard under the auspices of Touma. Itsuwa, who then stayed over at Touma’s residence as a guard, actually possessed overwhelming cooking skills and may have even placed Index’s freeloading position in jeopardy. And, a stream of tears was seen from Touma’s eyes...

However, even at such a transient period of rest, at long last, the strongest and most evil enemy had appeared...!!



か-12-17



とある魔術の禁書目録

16

鎌池和馬

電撃文庫

Ⓜ

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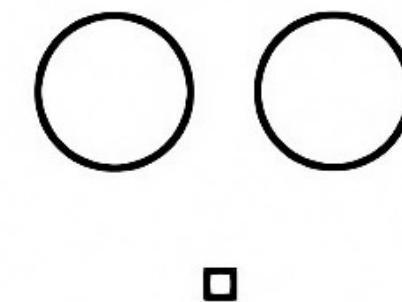
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Kamachi Kazuma

While Volume 15 was mainly about the science side, it will be about the magic side this time round. While it's a bit late, I now realize that you can fit various themes in a single series.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~16

Toaru Majutsu no Index SS

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I just bought a gaming handheld particularly famous for a hunting game. Thanks to it, I ended up thinking “Kids, please don’t try the things you see in real life, okay? It will be a problem otherwise.”


とある魔術の
禁書目録



鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ





"Ah, eh!? Why on earth would you be at such a place!?"

Academy City and Tokiwadai Middle School's Level 5—Misaka Mikoto

"...At a public bath like this, be quiet!"

Anglican Church nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books—Index

"Ah, n-no, you musn't get up!!"

Member of the Amakusa Church — Itsuwa



"Ah... Speaking of which, what's today's date?
M-my attendance's still okay, right!?"

High school student of Academy City — Kamijou Touma



“—Acqua of the Back will definitely come over.”

Supreme Pontiff of the Amakusa Church — Tatemiya Saiji

“—I am a Saint, and yet at the same time,
of God’s Right Seat!!”

Saint and member of the Roman Catholic Church’s “God’s Right Seat” — **Acqua of the Back**



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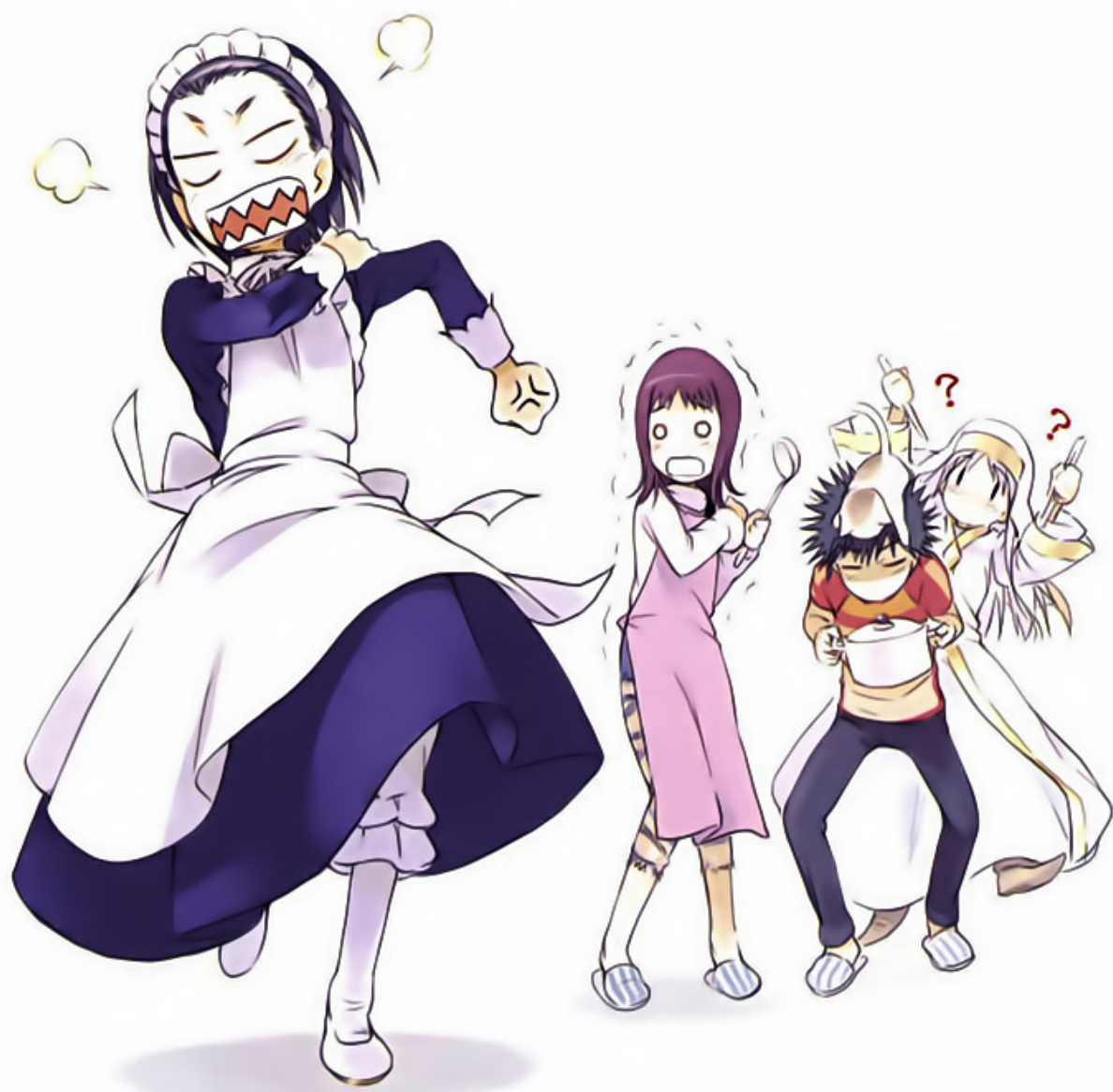
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TOARU MAJUTSU NO INDEX

とある魔術の 禁書目録 インデックス



KAMACHI KAZUMA

鎌池和馬

イラスト・灰村キヨタカ

HAIMURA KIYOTAKA

デザイン・渡邊宏一

PROLOGUE

The Standing of a Leader.

Stage_in_Roma.

The Roman Pope had a certain vivid memory.

It was from a visit to London for a meeting with the Anglican Church.

He had met with Laura Stuart, the woman of unknown age who stood at the top of the Anglican Church which was one of the three great Catholic denominations. That woman did indeed possess the skill needed to rule such a large organization. After all, she could use her words so skillfully that she not only hid her true intentions but she also created a situation where everything was already set in stone by the time anyone noticed the hidden meaning and direction of the discussion. If one let their guard down even slightly, they could end up agreeing to any sort of treaty. The three Roman Catholic secretaries who had accompanied him had been unable to put up with the tension and had been carried to the medical room partway through the meeting.

But that was not what stood out most vividly in the Roman Pope's memory.

That honor fell to what had happened thirty minutes after the meeting came to an end.

It had occurred at Lambeth Palace which was located near St. George's Cathedral. While the Roman Pope's luxury car had passed by that residence of the Anglican archbishop, it had been stopped at a red light. In that time, he had heard voices from the palace through an open window.

"It's only the beginning of September, so why do we already have so many of these Christmas cards?"

"Receiving them on Christmas is too late. They have sent them now because they are aware of our situation. It is a lot of hard work looking through all 250 thousand Christmas cards that arrive from all over England every year."

"You make it sound like it has nothing to do with you, Kanzaki."

“Whatever are you talking about? More importantly, your December schedule has been set, archbishop. Given the season, you will be going around to 43 orphanages and welfare facilities while dressed as Santa. This is official business, so please be understanding.”

“Very good. I have already acquired a bewitching miniskirt Santa costume that’s sure to cause some nosebleeds.”

“!!!!?? How can you say that after nodding and saying ‘very good’ so seriously!?”

“To be honest, I’m so very, very embarrassed, but I have no choice but to help out those pious Anglican believers.”

“You don’t need to help them with a strip show, you pervert!!”

“What!? Don’t tell me miniskirt Santas are so horribly out of fashion that they are considered perverted!”

“No, um, the problem is much more basic than that. The archbishop of the Anglican Church cannot choose an outfit that shows off as much of her legs as a miniskirt.”

“Hmph. So you don’t like the miniskirt, is that it? I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that a true fan service provider thinks differently. This is Kanzaki Kaori, the girl who went out of her way to truly show off her body to the Imagine Breaker boy in Japanese-style ‘debt repayment’. You truly are always standing on the front lines of exhibitionism.”

“Shut up, you amateur!!”

“!?”

“I was trying to keep quiet, but you just won’t shut up!! And if you hadn’t used that strange ‘collar’ spell on that girl, I never would have made that strange debt in the first place and Tsuchimikado wouldn’t be able to make fun of me for not being able to pay it back!!”

“K-Kanzaki? Kanzaki-saaaaan? Um, uh, is it just me or has your tone been a bit off for a while now?”

“I don’t want to hear anything about how I speak from someone who adds in Japanese honorifics for no reason!!”

“!? N-now that I cannot overlook. O-okay, it’s time to scold you. ...Stop it, Kanzaki!! You should not speak to the head of the Anglican Church like that!”

“Quiet down, amateur. I already made up my mind. From the moment that pervert Tsuchimikado laughed at me at that beachside inn, I knew it all led back to you. I knew I would never have had a debt to repay if it wasn’t for you and I decided to cast aside all respect I had for yooooooooouuuuuuuuu!!”

“E-eeee!? Stiyl! Stiiriiyl!!”

Oddly light sounds of destruction and screams tinged with enjoyment had come from Lambeth Palace.

That conversation had utterly failed as far as courtesy was concerned and it was unthinkable given the status and rank of those involved. Also, Lambeth Palace was one of the most secret of holy areas, so it was a problem simply to have the voices of the magicians inside heard outside. A housewife with her child walking nearby had initially looked surprised at the voices but had quickly begun chuckling as she walked by.

It had all been completely baffling.

But it had produced nothing but smiles.

Age differences, the hierarchy of power, the authority and dignity of belief, and everything else had all been stripped away, leaving behind only a perfectly equal world.

The Roman Pope had stared blankly at the scene while sitting in the back seat of his black luxury car and protected by countless bodyguards.

That did not seem like the same woman who had so easily handled the world-influencing meeting in St. George’s Cathedral. But at the same time, her actions here had not been overwhelmingly removed from the teachings of Christianity. Their father who watched over all his believers had said the following: love your neighbor, all mankind are brothers, and all are equal before the lord. Was this scene not a perfect example of that?

That was something that grew more difficult with age and social status.

It did not simply mean to approach one’s superiors as equals. Nor did it simply mean to treat your subordinates in a way that would not anger them. Laura Stuart would fight with anyone, insult them, go on a rampage, and occasionally speak in a slightly tearful voice. But it always ultimately resulted in laughter.

The Roman Pope had been extremely jealous of that slight early afternoon commotion.

That was the archbishop of the Anglican Church.

Ten years ago, twenty years ago, and the first time the Roman Pope had visited England, that woman of unknown age had always been smiling in that same way.

She was with everyone and a part of everyone.



The Roman Pope was overcome by those feelings as he walked through the streets of the current Italian capital of Rome.

He was on his way back from a short speech at the Basilica of Sant'Agostino. The path back to the Vatican was about 1.5 kilometers. When working within Rome, he made sure to travel by foot rather than having someone drive him. This was partially for his health and partially because he enjoyed breathing the air of Rome, but mostly because he wanted as many points of contact with the city's people as possible.

As he passed by sightseers, they would tense up in shock and forget to use their cameras. He could see a devout middle-aged woman praying in a building window.

But...

"This is far from a desirable situation," whispered the secretary next to the pope such that only the pope could hear.

He was officially known as a secretary, but he was actually a bodyguard skilled in martial arts. The title of secretary allowed him to remain by the Roman Pope's side even in places where military might was not allowed.

"Traveling by foot is simply too risky," continued the secretary. "A few bodyguards are posted around you, but it is far from perfect. You should use a convoy of spell-protected vehicles when travelling."

"I know."

"If you are trying to show that Christianity is equal to all, there are plenty of other effective methods. Making appropriate donations and then visiting orphanages and medical facilities would work well to increase public opinion of-..."

"I said I know."

With his good mood ruined, the Roman Pope repeated himself with a bit of harshness in his tone.

The secretary fell silent.

The Roman Pope let out a heavy sigh. No matter how much he hoped for equality, he did not think he was succeeding. The passersby and tourists were only looking at him in surprise and respect. He did not at all feel like he was a part of them like Laura Stuart had been that one time.

Suddenly, a filthy ball rolled out of a narrow alleyway.

It was about thirty centimeters in diameter. The cheap children's ball was made of a shiny material that might have been plastic or rubber.

Without thinking, he crouched down to pick up the ball, but the secretary's hand stopped him. He stopped moving and a child ran out of the alleyway in pursuit of the ball. She may have been a street child which were rare in this area. She looked about ten and her clothes were even dirtier than the ball.

The Roman Pope shook off the secretary's hand and moved to pick up the ball.

But a sharp voice cut him off.

"Stop."

He looked over and saw it was the girl.

"Who knows how much trouble you'd get in if you got those fancy clothes dirty."

The cold ring of her voice stopped the Roman Pope as if he had been struck by lightning. Meanwhile, the girl collected the ball, slowly moved away as if afraid he was a street thug, and then ran back into the narrow alleyway.

"..."

The Roman Pope could only stare blankly at the alley entrance.

Love your neighbor, all mankind are brothers, and all are equal before the lord.

Those words filled his mind and he clenched his teeth harder and harder.

"This is a problem," he muttered without thinking.

The secretary immediately agreed.

"Yes. How could she be so rude to the man who singlehandedly rules two billion believers? That is simply unacceptable. And in our headquarters of Italy no less. If she claims to be a believer, she should at least show the bare minimum of manners."

"..."

The Roman Pope sighed again as the secretary showed his complete lack of understanding.

When had it gotten like this?

He no longer felt anything but a strange sense of distance and a chill.

CHAPTER 1

From Peace to Ruin on the Proceeding Path.

Battle_of_Collapse.

Part 1

Due to a certain factor, fourth period dragged on oddly long.

By the time the normal high school boy named Kamijou Touma and his class ran to the school store and cafeteria, it was already too late. They were so horribly late that the store's bread had been wiped out, the cafeteria seats were filled, and those seats were unlikely to open up until the end of the lunch break. On top of that, the meal ticket machine had all of its "sold out" lights on like a cigarette vending machine late at night. Such misfortune. And the situation was entirely thanks to the digression caused by Kamijou Touma asking his history teacher, "Really? So what would've happened to Japan if Oda Nobunaga had created the Oda Shogunate?"

He felt responsible, so he headed to the faculty room to make a direct appeal to Komoe-sensei who was chowing down on a 580 yen healthy zaru soba set.

"Please at least open up the cooking classroom! I can make the Kamijou Special!! Just give me some leftover cold rice, grated cheese, and ketchup, and I can whip up something great!!"

But despite his plea, his teacher only smiled bitterly. To add insult to injury, the math teacher Oyafune Suama was eating a gorgeous seafood bowl with sea urchin and roe while the PE teacher Yomikawa Aiho was downing several nikuman that did not seem to be part of her lunch. This filled the room with delicious aromas, so Kamijou fled before he lost control of himself.

"I-is the drink machine the only path remaining? But will that be enough to get through my afternoon classes?"

The number of students suffering from a shortage of food numbered 21 in all. There was Kamijou Touma, Aogami Pierce, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Himegami Aisa who had forgotten to bring a lunch on this day of all days, Fukiyose Seiri who was out of mail-order health foods, and all the other boys and girls in the class who got their food from the cafeteria or the school store.

As they watched those with lunches eat their extremely delicious looking tiny Salisbury steaks, steamed dumplings, and other foods, the empty stomach alliance finally made up their minds.

“Let’s escape!! Let’s escape and go to a convenience store!!”

It was unclear who exactly had shouted that.

The next thing they knew, the cafeteria & school store group had formed a circle and begun a strategy meeting.

Times like this were when Fukiyose Seiri truly shined.

“If we all leave the school at once, the teachers will definitely notice. The odds of success are highest if we have a team of three or four take everyone’s money and buy all the food!!”

“Then what will the others do?” asked Himegami with a tilt of the head.

Kamijou raised his head.

“Provide backup by gathering information and creating diversions. We have to make sure the teachers don’t find out about this plan, so we need your help. We need to keep our cell phones connected. Only the latest information is of any use.”

“Okay, but where will we escape from, nyah?” Tsuchimikado drew a detailed diagram of the school on the back of a printout he no longer needed. “These are the locations related to intruder alarms. This infrared sensor is only active at night, so we don’t have to worry about it. Given the location of the faculty room, we’ll definitely be spotted at the fence if we leave through the front. Their window gives them a full view of the schoolyard there, nyah. It’s gotta be the back entrance. But the guy working at the store goes in and out through there. We’d be in trouble if we ran into him, nyah.”

“I see. So the trick is when we pass through the back entrance. Okay, let’s divide up the jobs!!”

On Fukiyose’s instructions, the 21 rebels divided into a few groups. Kamijou Touma, Aogami Pierce, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, and Fukiyose Seiri formed the team that would actually leave the school. It seemed they were known for being quick on their feet thanks to their usual idiotic commotions.

“But can we really entrust our lunches to Kamijou and his misfortune?”

“It’ll be fine. He can play the crucial role of the decoy.”

As his classmates whispered amongst themselves, Kamijou silenced them with his fist.

While still standing in a circle, they all pulled out their phones, set them to transceiver mode which connected multiple lines at once, and then synchronized the digital clock down to the second.

“Let’s go. Mission start!!”

Fukiyose clapped her hands twice and the cafeteria & store team scattered like baby spiders.

Kamijou, Aogami Pierce, Tsuchimikado, and Fukiyose hurried, but travelled down the hallway in what could be seen as a fast walk in order to avoid the simple mistake of being stopped for running in the hall.

“Time is the real issue here,” said Fukiyose as they made their way past a few teachers with a smile. “Lunchtime is when convenience stores make an overwhelming amount of their money. This escape will all be a waste if all the lunches are gone from the convenience store shelves as well!!”

They did not stop at the shoe lockers. If a teacher noticed they were wearing loafers instead of indoor shoes, their escape plan would be discovered. The fact that they had no shoes yet were not playing in the schoolyard made for a fairly fatal situation.

And so they had another group get some PE shoes which they exchanged for their indoor shoes. After travelling to the outdoor passageway connecting the school building to the gym, they put on the PE shoes and made their way outside. They then ran to the back entrance before anyone could question them.

The metal fence came into view.

No one was around. The problematic school store man was nowhere to be seen.

“Okay! Let’s make a run for it!!”

Kamijou tried to jump the fence.

But then a shrill siren reached him.

He turned around and saw the gorilla-like Saigo-sensei who seemed to be just returning from eating out at a family restaurant.

The educational guidance counselor was driving a four-door family car, but it was made for normal humans to ride. That openweight gorilla made it look as cramped as a phone booth.

“Tch!! We should have considered the possibility of the back entrance being used by faculty after parking!!”

Fukiyose regretted her own error, but Kamijou felt something else.

And that feeling led to a shout.

“No fair!! You went out to eat!? That muscular beast of a guidance counselor left us to battle our own in that over-capacity cafeteria while he went to enjoy a leisurely restaurant!?”

“K-Kami-yan, you idiot. Ignore him. If we get caught here, how will we ever get lunch!?”

Aogami Pierce’s shout brought Kamijou to his senses.

The gorilla teacher got out of his car and approached with terrifying speed, so Kamijou climbed over the metal fence to escape. Recognizing the unfavorable turn of events, Fukiyose quickly fled on a different route. Just before he was caught, Tsuchimikado kicked Aogami Pierce down from the fence to offer him up like a flare used as a missile countermeasure.

So as not to waste Aogami Pierce’s noble sacrifice, Kamijou and Tsuchimikado ran down the road with all their strength.

As he ran, Tsuchimikado looked over his shoulder and gained an expression of shock.

“Damn that gorilla teacher. He’s already taken out Aogami Pierce and is running this way, nyah!?”

“Seriously!? Tsuchimikado, let’s split up! We can’t let ourselves be wiped out here!!”

The two boys exchanged a nod and turned right and left at an intersection to increase their odds of survival.

Part 2

Itsuwa, a girl belonging to the Amakusa Christian Church, was near Kamijou’s high school.

She wore a pink tank top over a sweatshirt that was as fluffy as a sheep. Below, she wore deeply colored pants, but the pants had cuts wrapping around them with a transparent plastic material that prevented the fabric from moving out of place. This was a new Academy City design that boldly showed off the flesh color of her legs. She had carefully chosen her outfit in order to blend into this rare city that was 80% students. A suit when in a business district and a miniskirt when in a shopping district. That was the Amakusa style rather than Itsuwa’s personal style.

She had a reason for being in Academy City.

Two days before, a letter had arrived at the Anglican Church and the top levels of Academy City. It had been sent by Acqua of the Back, a member of the secret Roman Catholic organization known as God's Right Seat. The letters had been a sort of challenge. He had said he was on his way to utterly destroy Kamijou Touma and that they should send out their strongest forces if they wished to stop him.

It was of course possible the letters were fakes.

However, the one sent to the Anglicans had contained an additional item to boost its credibility.

To put it simply, it was Terra of the Left's remains.

Those remains had been gently wrapped in the highest quality velvet and shipped in a paulownia box that smelled faintly of wood. It was unclear if the extravagant jewelry box style decorations had been meant as ridicule for his enemies or a sign of respect.

The upper body ended at the waist and it definitely belonged to that member of God's Right Seat.

Itsuwa had directly fought Terra, so she had been called to St. George's Cathedral to confirm his identity. But that had left her bewildered.

There were two reasons for this.

First, Terra had supposedly been fried in Avignon by Academy City's weapons, but this corpse had clearly been sliced in two at the waist.

Second, if Terra had survived those Academy City weapons, how much strength had Acqua of the Back needed to so easily execute him?

The man had been killed in a single strike.

That was the story told by the bisecting wound.

As one who had directly fought Terra of the Left, Itsuwa could tell. That man had caused her to so much torment and had broken through an Academy City unit, so it would have taken extreme cruelty to rip his body apart by force like that.

And she had further questions.

Why had Acqua of the Back sent out an old-fashioned letter of challenge rather than attacking at a weak point as God's Right Seat had done before?

And why had he killed Terra of the Left and then used him in the letter of challenge?

His method had been so straightforward that the Anglican Church and Academy City had made many different speculations and suspected a trap, but they had been unable to grasp his true intentions. At any rate, if he was targeting Kamijou Touma, they had decided that defeating him here would be best, so the Anglicans had dispatched the Amakusa Christian Church.

It was normally forbidden for magicians to act as a group within Academy City.

That action was defined as crossing the line between the magic side and the science side.

But that agreement had been broken for this exceptional situation.

Itsuwa did not know the details, but the Anglican archbishop had likely struck some form of deal with the head of Academy City.

Most likely, the Anglicans had chosen a small independent group under their command like the Amakusas because they could be cut away like a lizard's tail if things grew inconvenient. It was also possible they had been chosen because they had originally operated within Japan and knew the land.

Either way, Itsuwa was now within Academy City where she could not normally be.

This was partly due to the world beginning to divide between the "Academy City and Anglican Church" side and the "Roman Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Church" side, but it was even more due to Acqua of the Back being such a great danger that he could not be defeated while following the rules.

To put it another way, Academy City and the Anglicans had both decided an attack solely by Acqua was more of a threat than the global chaos caused by crossing the line between the science and magic sides. That was how powerful an enemy the man was.

" ... "

Due to that situation, it had also been decided that Itsuwa would join the battle as Kamijou's bodyguard.

She needed to contact him as quickly as possible, but she also had enough sense not to arrive when he was in the middle of class. She was waiting in a position from which his class was visible and planned to take action once school let out.

(I need to do my best.)

She clenched her small fist as she secretly filled herself with motivation.

During the C-Document incident from a few days ago, her insufficient strength had left her unable to protect Kamijou through to the end. To make up for that fact, she was

prepared to act as a professional magician and not let anyone lay a finger on civilian Kamijou Touma.

She carried a bag over her shoulder and she could feel the weight of the dismantled Friuli Spear inside.

(With Vento of the Front and Terra of the Left, he has already defeated two members of God's Right Seat, but there has to be something for me to do. I need to do my best.)

And then a familiar face cut by in front of Itsuwa's eyes.

It was Kamijou Touma.

"Eh?"

She tilted her head as she wondered why and then she checked the time. There was no way school had been let out yet. Also, Kamijou's expression as he ran through the streets was not normal. It looked like he was being pursued by something.

Something may have happened.

Slight tension filled Itsuwa.

And then she saw a suspicious gorilla-like person cut by in front of her in pursuit of Kamijou.

The person's face looked the polygonal villain in a unique western video game.

Itsuwa thought about Kamijou, recalled that western video game face and then looked back toward Kamijou's fleeing back.

There was no way that gorilla was a normal person.

Kamijou Touma was a courageous veteran of many battles yet his face was filled with fear.

His expression made it look like he thought he would be torn limb from limb.

Finally, she came to a conclusion.

According to the report on September 30, Acqua of the Back was a man.

(He's already here!!)

She swiftly assembled her spear and charged straight toward the western game villain.

Part 3

Due to health reasons, Saigo, the disaster teacher in charge of life counseling, had to retreat.

“...Ha.”

After school, Kamijou, who had finally managed to finish the great battle of lunch, sighed heavily as he walked out of the school gate after changing his shoes at the shoe shelves. Right now, Itsuwa, who was still blue with shock, was standing there.

For some reason, she had appeared at the noon break, and like a spirit, intercepted the life-counseling teacher (with a spear, no less). It seemed like all of that had been a misjudgment on her part. “EH? He’s not Acqua of the Back? EHHH!? A SCHOOL TEACHER!?” and after which, Itsuwa had collapsed into confusion.

There were many questions Kamijou really wanted to ask Itsuwa, including ‘Why are you here in Academy City?’, but Itsuwa was rolling her eyes around in confusion as she tried to settle the gorilla-teacher problem, carrying his huge body and quickly heading to the hospital.

And it all ended up like this.

“I-I really... even if I’m useless, there’s got to be some limit...”

Itsuwa, who had come back from the hospital, was now sunk in a deep and bottomless-looking hole.

To Kamijou, if he had been caught by that gorilla teacher, he would have been thrown onto the asphalt floor by ancient martial arts, and afterwards, have gotten smothered with a sweaty pinning move combo; this was undeniable. Thus, it was hard to tell whether Itsuwa had served her purpose or not. However, it seemed that Itsuwa wasn’t down because of that.

(...Seems like it’s also not because she injured an ordinary person... because, that gorilla had a legend going about that he managed to catch a falling boulder with both hands while in a rockfall zone. That’s not an ordinary person.)

Anyway, no matter what, Kamijou decided to start by asking why Itsuwa, as a resident of the magic side, was appearing in the main base of the science side—Academy City.

“...Acqua of the Back. Do you still remember that name?”

Itsuwa trembled as she asked.

Kamijou’s eyebrows moved suspiciously.

“Yeah. I remember, he’s one of the members of God’s Right Seat...right? I met him once on the 30th of September.”

Yes, after Vento of the Front had been defeated in Academy City, it was Acqua who forced his way in. Besides being a member of God’s Right Seat, he had the capability of a Saint. It was impossible to imagine his battle prowess, and he was essentially different from all the enemies Kamijou had faced so far.

Though Kamijou didn’t really want to go anywhere, he continued to walk towards a busy street, chatting with Itsuwa.

“Then, what about Acqua? Don’t tell me he intends to do something strange in another country?”

“N-not that, that’s not it...”

Itsuwa looked like she had trouble articulating. After she seemingly processed everything in her brain, she finally said,

“Acqua of the Back’s target seems to be you.”

“Ha?”

“About that, both the Anglican Church and Academy City have gotten a challenge letter from Acqua. It was written that in these next few days, he’ll... um... come back to attack Kamijou Touma. So he told both sides to be wary, something like that.”

Itsuwa looked troubled, as she paused halfway through talking. She was like those parents who purposely concealed the extremely sensitive issues from their children.

His own life was being threatened by Acqua of God’s Right Seat... Just how serious was this? This ordinary high school student called Kamijou Touma was unable to immediately understand.

“God’s Right Seat, huh?”

Kamijou pondered for a while.

“Vento of the Front once said that in order to kill me, the Pope had to prepare the relevant documents to let them attack Academy City. But they probably wouldn’t mobilize such a powerful guy to attack me, an ordinary high school student.”

“AH!? NONONO! This is because you helped so many people and managed to stop the Roman Catholic Church from carrying out their underground deeds! How could they still consider you to be an ordinary high school student after you have done so many things!?”

For some reason, Itsuwa had begun to shout. Though it wasn't clear, Kamijou suitably concluded that most likely, she had been sent here by the Amakusa to guard him. Although he was praised by her, the boy standing here really was just an ordinary high school student, and there really wasn't anything about him that was praiseworthy.

"But Vento of the Front came here before... it's Acqua of the Back now?"

"Right now, the English Library's checking on his history. Including the other members of God's Right Seat, there hasn't been any important information dug up on him so far."

"Well, they are secret members of a secret organization."

"Though there hasn't been any specific information, he obviously has the strength worthy of a member of God's Right Seat and what seems to be the power of a Saint, so it'd be great if we can get the Priestess's assistance."

This Priestess she was talking about should be Kanzaki Kaori.

She was one of the 20 Saints in the world, and had managed to survive a fight against a real archangel. This was truly one achievement she could brag about.

It was true that Kanzaki's help could help the situation a lot more, but as a lot of things had happened in the past, there was a rift between Kanzaki and the Amakusa. Also, Stiyl once said that because Saints have such ridiculous powers, they were not allowed to go about freely.

"...But this doesn't mean we're completely at our wits' end,"

Itsuwa sounded like she wanted to discard any unrest as she said.

"God's Right Seat is an extremely powerful group of the magic side. Truthfully, even if we fight against them all, we can't guarantee that we could even manage a draw against them. But, Vento of the Front and Terra of the Left... we managed to fight them back. Why is that?"

"Mm."

"We didn't analyze the details thoroughly, so we can't say that our current intel is correct, but both sides have a common point of 'having been interfered greatly by the science side'. Terra of the Left was forced to change his plans because of those powered suits and supersonic bombers, and as for Vento of the Front, it was... that... thing which looks like an angel, right?"

Now that she mentions it, this was true.

It had been because of Academy City's irregular counterattacks managed to shake up the strongest magic group, God's Right Seat.

They hadn't been able to perform on the perfect stage where they could utilize all of their strength, but instead performed on the stage of the science side, which they were not used to. Maybe this was the real reason why they had managed to win.

"Then, to fight in Academy City where science is everywhere, there should be a huge significance."

"...I-I feel that things aren't that simple..."

"?"

Seeing Itsuwa continue to mince her words, Kamijou felt puzzled. Itsuwa immediately waved her hands to get over it.

"An-anyway! Acqua of the Back will be attacking, so I'll protect you well. The Anglican Church gave us orders to protect you, publicly and privately, so please do not worry too much!!"

Though Itsuwa said this with energy, Kamijou did feel that these words were important.

Wanting to verify whether he had heard this wrongly, Kamijou confirmed it again,

"Itsuwa, why are you here?"

"Do I need to say it? I'm here to be your bodyguard."

Itsuwa clenched her small fist. Seeing her like this, Kamijou felt that every part of his body was getting stiff.

So he asked again.

"Itsuwa, why are you here?"

"I said it before, I'm here to be a bodyguard, to stick to you and protect you."

Part 4

The substitute Supreme Pontiff of the Amakusa-style Church, Tatemiya Saiji was hiding behind a building, his eyes leaving the pair of binoculars.

They were beside a little cinema. Nearby, there was a little lateral path, and at the entrance, there was a lottery shop that was conveniently and deliberately placed there to block the line of sight. This was supposedly a crowded place, yet unexpectedly, hardly anyone noticed this place — a really intriguing place.

Showing a dirty look as he held the binoculars with one hand, the narrow-eyed Tatemiya silently said,

“...How boring.”

Regarding this comment, the big guy beside him, Ushibuka, was pretending to read a magazine while nodding his head in agreement.

“That Itsuwa...she’s been talking about work all this time, not even going on the offense.”

“Yeah, we finally gave her the perfect chance to get real close to Kamijou Touma, yet she hasn’t done any self-revealing yet. Looks like she’s forgotten about the greatest weapons on her body.”

“What’s Itsuwa’s greatest weapon?” The lanky teenager, Kouyagi, asked as he continued to pop popcorn into his mouth.

Tatemiya rummaged through a tossed-aside bag and pulled out something like a whiteboard used for a riddle contest. The black marker then started to run on the whiteboard.

After that, he wrote the correct answer on the whiteboard and showed it to everyone.

“—Yes, that’s Itsuwa’s huge, hidden breasts!!” Tatemiya widened his eyes as he said this.

Besides Ushibuka and Kouyagi, a group of men, including the middle-aged man Isahaya and the already married Nomozaki, immediately gathered towards where Tatemiya was.

“On what basis do you make this hypothesis, Pope!?”

“To actually say such a thing... I won’t agree to this kind of horse race-like prediction, you bastard!!”

The males all pent out steam from their nostrils, and Tatemiya again moved the black marker on the whiteboard.

“According to the great Itsuwa Massage battle, her sore shoulders index is 40. But considering Itsuwa’s muscle strength and activity level, and also her clothes, equipment, and everything else she has, even after totaling all these, it’d be weird if her maximum sore shoulder index even reached 37.”

“If so, this means...”

A group of men swallowed their saliva.

Tatemiya seriously nodded his head. He gathered all of his energy in his abdomen before declaring in a high-pitched voice:

“Yes, this sore shoulder index has only a difference of 3. This is the best evidence to show that Itsuwa has huge hidden breasts!!”

Because of this stunning truth that was written plainly on the whiteboard, Ushibuka and Kouyagi immediately fainted. Isahaya, who was over 50 years old, seemed like he was happy about seeing his own granddaughter grow up. On the other side, Nomozaki was, on one hand, muttering to himself that breasts should be a bit smaller, and on the other hand, he seemed both regretful and disappointed.

Standing slightly farther away, the blond female, Tsushima, looked like she was seeing a bunch of idiots, and sighed heavily.

“...Stop talking about such useless things; keep your eyes on the one being guarded.”

Tatemiya and the other males got a dampener over them. With probing eyes, they stared at Tsushima’s body, whose height was disproportionate to her bust size.

“Tsushima-senpai’s ambiguous, so she shouldn’t say much.”

“WHAT!?”

“No matter what, at least tall people should have huge breasts, or short people with small breasts. Tsushima doesn’t have a fixed character trait, that’s why.”

Beside Tsushima, who was unable to say anything, Tatemiya pulled out a new whiteboard and uses the black marker on it.

“Sheesh, don’t you guys know this—the legend of Tsushima’s beautiful legs!!”

Not knowing what the substitute Supreme Pontiff could say next, Tsushima kicked Tatemiya right between the legs to force him to shut up.

The males seemed uninterested in Tsushima, as they all choose to ignore this side and focus on Itsuwa.

“But is this really alright? That Itsuwa looks like she’s going to continue with the wet napkins tactic.”

“It’s true that Itsuwa’s too passive. She won’t be able to climb over the fence at this rate...” Isahaya, who was more than half a century old, said while gritting his teeth.

At this moment, Tatemiya, with tears in his eyes, again snatched the right to lead the conversation.

“Yes, to allow Itsuwa to display her extra-large oranges to the maximum, we can’t let this continue.”

“Eh...? Extra-large oranges!? I thought they’re at most as big as apples!!”

Beside Ushibuka, who was making a ruckus, Kouyagi asked,

“But substitute Supreme Pontiff, it’s useless to discuss this further, right? Itsuwa’s really maturing too late.”

“Humph, that’s why I prepared a countermeasure.”

Tatemiya unveiled an evil smile as he pulled out something from a pretty bag.

“A soccer ball?”

“The wilderness sharpshooter Tatemiya Saiji will again propose a free kick match.”

Part 5

Because of recent events during the past few days, Misaka Mikoto was in a daze.

Ever since she became aware of ‘a certain thing’ regarding Kamijou Touma, she had always been like this. No matter how much she considered it, the problem wouldn’t settle. No matter how much time was lost, the problem wouldn’t settle. It was like asking someone to answer a question he couldn’t answer: no matter how much the person thought, he would continue to be stuck at the same spot.

(As expected, that wasn’t a bluff.)

That certain thing.

In other words, it was... a loss of memory.

It was supposed to just be a sentence consisting of only a few words, yet it shook Mikoto’s heart up.

(But, since when...?)

She hadn’t felt that anything was amiss during the date on the 30th of September, and there hadn’t been any change during the Daihaseisai tournament. Did something happen on the 31st of August? Or was it that time when he interacted with the Sisters and Accelerator?

“ ... ”

She couldn’t make a correct judgment.

If so, even though that boy looked like he was near to her to some people, there were a lot of things about him that she didn't know about.

(I know that this isn't something that can be solved by worrying about it.)

Since when did he become like this? How much of his memory was lost? Does this affect his life? Did he let a doctor check up on this before? Is there really no way to treat this?

And,

How much of his memories with her were lost?

(I could check it out with someone that's an expert in mental control, but...)

In Tokiwadai Middle School, besides Mikoto, there was another person who was also a Level 5. In terms of mental control, she was at the top of Academy City—in other words, she was the strongest ever in regards of her Mental Out. Reading other people's memories, changing other people's personalities, carrying out conversations with people far away, destroying memories and willpower, revealing feelings and transplanting them... No matter what kind of mental phenomenon it was, she could control them all. Like a Swiss knife, she was a multi-functional Level 5.

“But I'm not used to dealing with her...”

She subconsciously said out loud.

This meant that Mikoto didn't really want to deal with that esper.

Unlike Mikoto, whom was unaffiliated to any sect, she was the queen of ojous, the leader of the largest sect in Tokiwadai Middle School. From this, it was obvious that both of them were incompatible. If Mikoto was to seek her to talk, it would end up with Mikoto being in her debt... In the worst case scenario, she could do some unnecessary things to that idiot during the therapy. Accurately saying, the trust placed with her wasn't so great that Mikoto was willing to place her friend into that person's hands.

So she shouldn't consider this.

Anyway, Mikoto decided to chase away this existence of another Level 5.

(Even though I understand that idiot's personal problems, yet asking me not to mind about it, it's obvious that I can't do it. I'm not the kind of person who won't care about other people.)

Why didn't he go look for her? Should he continue to pretend that he doesn't know anything? Including these questions into the mix, Mikoto had no other choice but to grit her teeth. Furthermore, Kamijou Touma himself did not know that Mikoto was aware about this issue, and it looked like he didn't wish for her to be.

If she forcefully confronted him... through that, there was a high likelihood that a lot of damage could be done to him.

Now, what should she do?

Was there anything she *can* do?

(AH!! DAMN IT. WHY AM I BEING SO BOTHERED ABOUT THAT IDIOT'S PROBLEMS!? I'M GETTING ALL WORRIED AND GETTING MY BRAIN ALL AFFECTED, AND THIS MAKES ME EVEN MORE WORRIED! Maybe I should recollect my thoughts.)

She wanted to say that, but if she was really able to change feelings so easily, she wouldn't be so bothered.

Thinking about all of these, Mikoto sighed heavily. At this moment,

“...?”

She just so happens to see a group of suspicious people beside a little cinema.

A large man placed a soccer ball on the ground. He had black hair that was as shiny as a beetle, and after nodding to the surrounding people, he did a little start up run before kicking the ball forcefully.

The forcefully-kicked ball soared, spinning end over end, making a sharp arc. If it were a proper match, it was most likely that this free kick would have passed over the defense's wall and headed into the goal.

What were they doing on the road? Mikoto's eyes naturally moved towards the destination of the soccer ball.

At that moment, she froze.

PAM!! With a crisp sound, the side of Kamijou Touma's head collided heavily with the soccer ball.

Possibly because of the impact from the soccer ball, Kamijou's head sunk deeply into the valley of the chest of the girl who was walking beside him.

It looked like the impact just now was rather great, but Kamijou was just buried into the girl's chest for a while. The girl looked like she didn't know what to do and blushed before rubbing on the part of his head that had been hit. This entire sequence of events just gave the wrong impression that Kamijou's head was being forced in.



Because of the sudden series of events, Mikoto was unable to say anything. At this moment, shouts of 'bravo!' could be heard. Looking at where the voices were coming from, it seemed like the guy who had made that free kick and those young guys were happily giving high-fives to each other.

Pacha pacha One could hear the sounds of sparks falling.

After realizing that this was due to the high voltage emitting from her body, Mikoto exploded.

"There's someone here with all sorts of trouble... STOP GIVING ME ALL SORTS OF TROUBLES, YOU BASTARDS!!!"

The long spears of thunderbolts continued to shoot out from Mikoto's bangs. After noticing this, beetle-head and company immediately dispersed, and in the next moment, vanished without a trace. Like a chameleon mixing into the crowd, they could not be found by her. Mikoto was intrigued by that.

Yet even after losing her target, her anger wasn't kept in check.

Besides, that mastermind, the hedgehog-head boy still had his head buried inside the girl's chest, and even gave an "Uuuu..." sound as if he was saying something. It was like a dazed and sleepy child grabbing a certain expanded part of a girl.

"That idiot... HOW LONG MUST HE CONTINUE TO BE MESMERIZED BY THE FEMALE ANATOMY!?!?!"

Mikoto shouted and immediately dashed towards Kamijou, who, logically, should be the one punished.

Part 6

Such a pitiful day.

Kamijou Touma exhaled heavily. After suddenly being hit in the head by a soccer ball, he had been chased around by Mikoto's lightning attacks. In order to fulfill her job, Itsuwa had started to assemble her spear, and in order to stop her, Kamijou hugged her. But for some reason, Mikoto got angry again, so in an attempt to avoid her electric attacks, he ran around Academy City. As for the running distance, with that level of activity, nobody would worry about him having too much fat or get sick.

And right now, there was a new problem in front of him.

Yes, *this* was the most problematic situation,

“...Ah, Touma. Why is someone from the Amakusa here?”

The most dangerous checkpoint of today.

The door to the dormitory was opened, and this sentence from Index was enough to make Kamijou sweat heavily. Index looked like she was ready to bite as she continued to grind her teeth. Kamijou was already terrified upon seeing just the fangs alone.

On a side note, the calico cat with Index continued to circle around Itsuwa, and it seemed to be smelling her as if asking the question ‘Who is she? Who?’

Kamijou wiped away the sweat on his body as he said,

“No, it’s not that. This, that, err, how am I supposed to explain this...?”

He stared at Itsuwa’s face while she was still blankly standing there.

“In other words, the God’s Right Seat—”

“KYAAH!!”

Kamijou suddenly let out a ridiculous scream, scaring Itsuwa such that she couldn’t make a sound. From behind, Kamijou held Itsuwa’s neck with his wrist and quickly pulled her away from Index, silently going through a battle plan.

“(…Miss Itsuwa!! Regarding that, can you please keep it a secret from Index!?)”

“Wa, wa...”

“(…Acqua’s target is only me; it’s alright as long as he doesn’t target Index! So it’ll be bad if you say some unnecessary words and get Index involved in some dangerous situation, don’t you think?)”

“WAWAWAWAWAWAWAWAWAWAWA!?”

“(…Itsuwa, do you hear me?)”

“I, I hear it!! I, I, I, I hear it clearly!!”

For some reason, Itsuwa’s face was all red as she nodded her head up and down.

Was it making her feel discomfort? Kamijou took his wrist off her neck. But after that, Itsuwa’s disappointed expression made him all the more puzzled.

At this moment,

“ ... ”

From who knew when, Index started to conceal all emotion, even temper, just muttering a ‘...never mind’ before turning around to watch the television again. This act made people feel a lot less secure. This was to be expected, since it was no longer on the level of ‘this idiot, idiot! Touma, you idiot!’ It was the same as in the past when he had saved his classmate, Himegami; he constantly felt that there was an unknown aura surfacing. Why was it like this? Why was Index angry? After Kamijou trembled for a while, he made a decision and got both knees on the ground, poking his head out and sitting behind Index.

“...That, I don’t know what’s going on, but can you please bite me before you explode? If you can use up a bit of that anger power, it at least feels that Kamijou-san can settle this before his skull gets bitten to bits.”

Not knowing what to do, Itsuwa continued to stare at the two that weren’t doing anything, and because of her sense of duty, she hadn’t resigned from her job yet. After purposely looking away for a while, she looked at the calico cat that had confirmed her smell and was together with her.

“Oh, oh yes! Little kitten, do you want this present?”

Seemingly trying to break the deadlock, Itsuwa started to look for something in her huge bag (Oh? She couldn’t possibly know that Kamijou’s house has a cat for a pet, right...?). She pulled out a high-class golden can that had the words ‘Cat’s food association: a 3-star platinum rank’. On seeing the can, the calico kitty immediately trembled before remaining at the same position. Its eyes widened, its back straightened, and even when Itsuwa opened the can and reached over, the kitten gave the feeling of ‘About that, I’m just an ordinary cat — can I really eat this level of food nya!?’

Sitting there upright, Kamijou noticed that there was something in Itsuwa’s bag.

“...Why does Itsuwa’s bag have meat and vegetables? Is this some secret spell required of the Amakusa?”

“No, no, there’s no need to fast,”

Itsuwa replied as she waved her hands in front of her.

“I passed by a supermarket before I came here. About that, if it’s just some simple dishes, I can still do them. No matter what, as a bodyguard, I can’t just eat and drink here for free. Please entrust the housework and like to me; just order anything of me, if I can do it.”

At this moment, Kamijou didn’t understand what she said.

After a few blank seconds, his mind finally processed what Itsuwa said. This time, he wordlessly turned towards Index.

“Wha, what, Touma? Why did the atmosphere in the house change?”

“Just ask yourself that. Handing everything over to Kamijou-san, who exactly is the one who hasn’t helped out one bit?”

“Uu, mm, I’m sorry, but...? Ah! Are you intending to change the atmosphere forcefully with this...!?”

Although Index saw through Kamijou’s intentions, once the flow of events had changed, it was hard to revert it back. Kamijou naturally turned around and headed into the kitchen space.

“Then, it’s better for me to tell you where the wok is.”

“Ah yes, thank you.”

Both of them exchanged this conversation, and the white nun had been completely ignored, having thrown all sorts of questions like ‘why did it become like this’, and ‘always like this, just what is he trying to do?’ into the dustbin.

(But why would Itsuwa, a shrinking violet, have such enthusiasm!? How am I going to explain things that I don’t understand? But at least I can thank Itsuwa first! Haha!! It’s good to escape from Index’s demonic clutches without getting bitten. How great is this GGYYYAAAHHH!!!)

Just as Kamijou was delighting in the victory, he was forcefully bitten on the back of the head by Index, and was now rolling on the floor in pain. In the meantime, he knocked into the deluxe cat canned food and flipped the contents out. ‘What a waste!! I’m tucking in! Eating it all now!!’ the calico kitten started to indulge in the food.

Itsuwa could only force a smile as she walked into the kitchen.

To her, the scene now was a happy and jolly one, but for the main party involved, it was as if he had just come back from the gates of Hell.

(Come to think of it...)

To be able to mix into the surroundings perfectly was one of the Amakusa’s ability. Kamijou looked at Itsuwa, who had been accepted so naturally.

As he had just been bitten on the back of the head, the human teeth marks were still there. Kamijou lay on the floor like a corpse, and he could hear the sound of food being stir-fried.

(...The, the scene of a girl cooking.)

Though it was stupid, he still teared up.

“Eh? Why is Touma revealing a look of a sheep, as if he just saw a miracle?”

As Index said this, Kamijou seemed like he had just gotten baptized by the light of grace emitted by a nun.

But, he would feel mindful about seeing Itsuwa cook and yet not do anything himself. Might as well clean the room up. Kamijou pondered seriously.

On the other hand, Index, who was biting on Kamijou's head to relieve her stress, was attracted by the smell of the food like small fish being attracted by bait as she slowly crept into the room.

"AH! Don't eat the food anytime you want to!!"

"Even though you say it now, I can't take it anymore."

Index immediately lost to her hungry stomach and started to bother Itsuwa, who was cooking. Seeing Index like this, Kamijou Touma got up, and then got into a dashing position before getting over to Index, grabbing her waist with both hands before pulling her out of the kitchen. Using the momentum of his starting run, he threw her onto the bed with a strange professional wrestling throw while yelling "soryaaaa!!"

"STOP DESTROYING A *MAN'S* DREAAAAAMMMMMM!!!!"

"WAAH! Tou, Touma, what's going on!?"

Due to shock, Index's eyes continued to twirl in confusion. Hearing her shout, the calico cat put in some distance in irritation.

Kamijou didn't make a reply, and wordlessly grabbed Index's head with one hand, turning it towards the kitchen.

"LOOK, INDEX!! THIS SHOULD BE HOW YOU BEHAVE WHEN YOU LIVE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S HOUSE!!"

"OWOWOWOWOW!?! Why is Touma acting so weird today!?"

"If I'm to calm down and think, why is it always you who's over there eating and sleeping, and then watching the television!? FROM TODAY ONWARDS, YOU'RE GOING TO WORK! HURRY UP, GET A SPONGE AND CLEANING DETERGENT, AND CLEAN UP THE BATHROOM!!!"

"Eh, but it's about time for Magical-Powered Kanamin Integral to start, right?"

"Good, HURRY UP AND GET TO WOOOOOOOOOOOOOORK!!!"

Why? While Index was still puzzled, she was thrown into the bathroom by Kamijou. Seeing someone serious like Itsuwa, it should allow her to change. Oh yeah, the ones who were with her in the past included a pyromaniac-like priest with a cigarette stench and a

multi-sided spy who continued to laugh slyly all year long, so compared to them, she could be considered normal, but upon thinking about it carefully, Itsuwa was still the most suited to be called an ordinary human.

(Then, I should start cleaning up the room like a serious person.)

Though Kamijou considered this...but compared to Itsuwa, who was cooking for others, Kamijou was just cleaning his own room, and these things couldn't be compared. But no matter what, it was better than not doing anything at all. After making this conclusion, Kamijou started to tidy up the messed up living room by picking up all the magazines.

At this moment...

“Wha, what’s with this traditional Japanese cuisine smell!?”

Suddenly, he could hear a girl’s shout, and after that, he heard the sound of plastic breaking. Kamijou panicked and turned his head toward the veranda, and Itsuwa, who was in shock, stopped moving her hands that had been working on the meal. Appearing there was Tsuchimikado Maika in a maid outfit.

It seemed like she had broken the ‘except in case of a fire, please do not break this board which is meant to separate the rooms and the balcony’ board without any hesitation, and invaded here.

“DAMN IT!! I FINALLY MANAGED TO MAKE A SERIOUS TURNOVER, AND NOW I HAVE ANOTHER WEIRDO HERE!!”

Ignoring a really irritated Kamijou, Maika, who normally lacked changes of expression, looked extremely serious as she smelled her way to the kitchen.

“...I smell it, I smell it... This miso soup... you used dried scallop to hide the smell, and you added it after grounding it into powder, right...?”

“How, how did you know that!? Not even mum saw through that!!”

Itsuwa was shocked that the food expert saw through it.

So the basics of cooking come from the mother! Besides Kamijou, there was a small plate that Itsuwa used to hold a bit of the miso soup. After considering for a while, Itsuwa passed the plate over the girl in maid clothes.

Maika received the plate in a tea dance-like movement, and without any sound, places her lips near it. After drinking it, she paused for a while—GUAAHH!! Suddenly, her eyes widened as she shouted.

Maika’s shoulders continued to tremble as she said,

“This, this woman, she’s good...”

“What?”

“GUAAAH!! HOW, HOW CAN THIS BE POSSIBLE!!”

For some reason, Maika immediately went 180 degrees and through the veranda, moving back into the neighboring room.

Through the open window, a conversation between siblings could be heard.

“Ah, oi!? Why are you throwing away today’s cream stew nyaa!? What’s going to happen to my dinner!?”

“SHUT UP, YOU AMATEUR!! SEEING SUCH AN OUTSTANDING DISH, THIS LEVEL OF THING ISN’T GOING TO MATCH UP AGAINST THAT! YOU, YOU JUST WATCH, FROM NOW ON, I’LL SHOW YOU WHAT A MISO SOUP IS REALLY LIKE!!”

“EH!? I FEEL THAT CREAM STEW IS GOOD TOO, YOU KNOW!?”. Hearing the blond, sunglasses-wearing agent’s moan about stew, Itsuwa’s shoulders trembled in fear.

“That, that, that guy’s voice just now, I seem to have heard it in Avignon before...? Speaking of which, who’s that kid?”

I’m not so sure myself, but it seems like you’ve hurt the pride of that prospective maid, so she views you as a rival...Kamijou paused. Itsuwa was a normal human; he felt that he shouldn’t let her get used to those weirdoes’ antics.

To Kamijou, he was just thinking about all of these.

If he had a wish that God could grant, it would be that this girl wouldn’t become like those weirdoes.

Part 7

At one moment Index and Itsuwa were engaged in a pretty dangerous situation, but once Index ate the food Itsuwa made, the dangerous atmosphere had disappeared without a trace; and now she was rolling on the floor asking Itsuwa for an 8th bowl of rice. Itsuwa was bothered by this, and as for the calico cat, it was biting on the ball of wet napkins that Itsuwa had made, playing around with it.

(Hah... Well, if it doesn’t cause any huge problems, it’s all good.)

If 'Index's mood can improve because from this', would I have to prepare some meat, fish or sausages to placate Index? Though Kamijou thought this way... No, wait, if Index knows that I've been hiding food, won't I get bitten the moment I reveal it? Kamijou readjusted his thoughts. Though it was a good idea, it seemed that carrying it out was still a lot more difficult.

But since they had already eaten lunch, there was nothing else for them to do.

He didn't have any school assignments today, and Kamijou wasn't one who'd take the initiative to go and study, so what was left to do was to bathe and sleep.

However, here was the problem.

“—HOW IS IT THAT YOU CAN BREAK THE BATHTUB WITH JUST A SPONGE AND DETERGENT, INDEX!?!”

“Ev, even if you say that, I only followed Touma's instructions and just went 'creak creak' a few times!!”

Kamijou and Index's shouts echoed through the night street, and Itsuwa made a forced smile.

The reason why the trio were on the streets was simple: Kamijou's bathtub (or more accurately, the water heater) was damaged and couldn't be used, so the trio were forced to move to a public bath.

“I WOULD BET THAT INDEX DIDN'T FOLLOW WHAT KAMIJOU-SAN SAID TO SCRUB IT THOROUGHLY! COME TO THINK OF IT, WHY DOES THE SINK IN THE BATHTUB SMELL OF MELTED PLASTIC!? LET ME GUESS, INDEX, DID YOU POUR A LARGE AMOUNT OF DETERGENT INSIDE!!?”

“Eh? Didn't you say that you can make things clean by just pouring detergent in?”

“VERY GOOD! AN INCREDIBLE NATURAL AIRHEAD HAS APPEARED!! THANKS TO YOU, THE WATER HEATER'S ALL BURNED UP, AND WE ALMOST HAD A FIRE ON OUR HANDS!!!”

“Ah, ah haha. W, well, isn't it good to go out to a bathhouse and change a bit of the atmosphere? This isn't bad.”

Itsuwa used her god-like interrupting skills to appease the atmosphere between Kamijou and Index.

These creatures called humans could slowly calm down as long as someone did a little adjustment to a huge commotion.

“Unexpectedly, Academy City has quite a lot of bathhouses. From those kinds of old public bathhouses to some natural hot springs... Oh yeah, what’s here? It seems like a large spa with entertainment facilities.”

“...Speaking of which, why does Itsuwa have such detailed information about Academy City?”

Kamijou didn’t even know that Academy City had natural hot springs. And the guidebook-like thing that Itsuwa was holding didn’t even look like the typical one Academy City released, but a torn and tattered old notebook.

“(…Eh, about that. Getting a good grasp of the surrounding geography is what a bodyguard should do.)”

Itsuwa said in a volume that Index couldn’t hear.

“(…Besides, Acqua’s from the magic side, so I’m checking the pulse flow throughout this street, and if possible, checking his movements would be a lot easier.)”

…It was good to be so enthusiastic about work, but before Acqua arrived, Anti-Skill wouldn’t come over under the charge of tight security. Regarding this, Kamijou was a bit uncomfortable.

“Then, where’s that recreational bath?”

“Mm... it seems to be in District 22. This is District 7, so in other words, it’s at the edge of Academy City.”

“If you’re talking about District 22... an underground street, huh.”

The place took up only 2 square kilometers, and among all the school districts, it was the smallest in area. However, it was developed underground about several hundred meters in depth, so it could be considered the one district that had the most scientific style.

“Hm, but the last bus just left.”

Itsuwa continued to flip through the old notebook,

“It’s not that far. If we borrow a 3-seater motorbike, we can get there right away. Luckily, there’s a bike rental shop here.”

“Eh? Itsuwa knows how to ride a bike?”

“Ma, well, basically, I still can. Cars, motorcycles, mini-boats... ah, even though I can’t pilot a plane, if it’s a helicopter, I still can...”

From Itsuwa’s tone, it seemed that she still felt incapable.

Was not being able to pilot a plane really something worth being mindful about?

“Since we’re in Japan, the transport network is really good, so it’s not really necessary, but...for work, there’s a need to go to the vast desert or grasslands or places like that.”

Seemed like Itsuwa wasn’t boasting; on the contrary, it seemed that she was being lectured as her voice got softer and softer until it was as loud as a mosquito buzz. However, it meant that she didn’t just have any ordinary license in Japan, but rather, an international license. To Kamijou, who just found that being able to ride a unicycle was impressive enough, Itsuwa was someone really worth respecting.

Today, this ordinary girl called Itsuwa really had quite a few surprising sides, and Kamijou was slightly touched as they walked towards the motorbike rental shop near a student dormitory. In this Academy City that was full of students, the need to rent bikes was a lot higher than cars.

Seeing the rent prices on the pricing board, Kamijou revealed a thunderstruck-like expression.

“Oh, oh yeah. Itsuwa’s not a student from District 7, so she can’t enjoy any district premiums!!”

“Eh, there’s no need to worry; I have enough military funding.”

Although Itsuwa said that, to Kamijou, who had a housewife-like accounting ability, he would still choose a cheaper one if possible. This was the most basic way to go.

In the end, they made use of a premium rate for those that missed the last ride and were unable to go home, and rented a 2-seater medium sized bike. They also paid extra to rent a side seat.

The one driving the motorbike was Itsuwa, the one sitting behind was Kamijou, and Index was sitting in the side car.

“Touma, I can sense some intention from this, you know?”

“No, there’s no such thing. How about you call this ladies first? The side car’s the most comfortable, so Kamijou-san has no choice but to give you that seat.”

Kamijou tried to force an explanation, but Itsuwa, who was being hugged on the abdomen, felt her heart beating like crazy.

Itsuwa tried to help Index put the helmet on her nun’s cap, and suddenly remembered something. She said,

“Come to think of which, is it really alright to leave the cat at home?”

“No matter what, we can’t bring animals to a bathhouse. Well, that cat would continue to move around in a circle, so there shouldn’t be any problems.”

On a side note, that calico kitten was standing in front of the high-class scratchboard that Itsuwa brought back. ‘Wh, what!? This thing has an attractive smell, but can I really scratch this thing without making anyone angry!?’, considering all of this as it trembles. Of course, nobody noticed it.

Just like that, when Index finally understood the correct way to put on the helmet, Itsuwa started the engine of the motorbike.

“Wow, the night Academy City sure is nice. No matter whether it’s the control or the engine sound, it makes me so relaxed. The road surface is in rather good condition as well; I feel like I can speed up whenever... ahh, if I had known, I might as well have challenged that famous thing from Academy City, that super electromagnetic motorcycle. It’s said that the wheels and axles are held together by magnets, letting the donut-shaped wheel pass through the motor gas and run.”

“Well, I don’t really understand bikes, but outside technology can’t even be compared to this. Also, I hope that you would drive safely—STUPID ITSUWA, YOU’RE REALLY, REALLY SPEEDING UP!!?”

Kamijou reflexively increased the strength of his grip on Itsuwa’s waist, but Itsuwa, really happy about this reaction, didn’t notice that she was speeding up.

Kamijou’s dormitory was located in a corner of District 7, and the distance to District 22 could be covered by walking. The reason why Itsuwa would rent a motorbike was most likely because they could go home immediately, and if it took a long time, their thoroughly-bathed bodies would be dry.

Coming out of District 7 and entering District 22, Index, who was seated in the side car, widened her eyes.

“WAAHH! Touma, look, there’s a jungle gym! A huge jungle gym!!”

The surface of District 22 was a lot different from the other districts. On the surface, there weren’t any buildings here, just a whole stretch of windmills. Furthermore, the windmills here were a whole lot different from the rest, as they weren’t just a replacement of electric cables. Like the metal frames in a building, there were parallel pillars linking both of them, and the 30-stories tall pile of the large number of windmills were placed there, arranged as a structure. This view resembled just what Index mentioned, a giant jungle gym.

Itsuwa handled the handlebar, turning the bike towards the underground street entrance, saying,

“District 22 is extended downwards, so it can’t rely on wind-generated electricity or solar-generated electricity. Also, the underground streets seem like they need a lot of electrical energy, so I heard that they have all sorts of energy generators all over Academy City.”

Having an unexpectedly large amount of knowledge, Itsuwa steered the motorbike through the rectangular door and down into the underground.

The space in the underground District 22 was a giant cylindrical area, and the entrance looked like it was outside this 2 kilometer diameter area, continuing to spiral down to the bottom. Including the passage that was heading the other way, it looked like the signs used at a barber shop.

In this gradually spiraling downwards tunnel, the orange light shone onto the ground. Seeing the infrastructure that was completely different from ordinary streets, Index raised her hands and cheered.

Kamijou smelled the exhaust gases released by the vehicles as he said to Itsuwa,

“These underground streets, they aren’t suited for Japan. It’s scary when there’s an earthquake, you know. Actually, no matter how strong the walls are, once there’s an earthquake that can level the ground, the entire thing will be destroyed.”

“The place here is really safe against earthquakes. Oh yeah, this huge spiral path is like a huge spring: it can absorb the impact when there’s an earthquake. Haven’t you heard of this before?”

“...That is just some baseless rumor. Speaking of which, Itsuwa, why would you check up on things that don’t appear on the blueprints, layouts, and aren’t real?”

“Ah, ah haha,” Itsuwa just let out a forced laugh.

“However, where’s that entertainment bathhouse?”

“Well, it seems to be on the 3rd level.”

“Touma, what’s this ‘kaisou’? Some sort of vegetable?¹”

“Not seaweed, level. District 22 is split into 10 underground levels, and we’re going to the third one right now.”

While saying this, they could see the third level—a gate that was 90m underground. Itsuwa turned on the indicator, slowing down as she headed toward the door.

Passing through the rectangular door, their vision suddenly widened.

¹ Both ‘level’ and ‘seaweed’ are pronounced as ‘kaisou’ (かいそう), a mistake on Index’s part.

“WAHH...!!”

Index couldn't help but let out a shout.

In contrast to the orange lights in the tunnel, the place here was a slightly blue space. In this place that was 2km in diameter, the ceiling had become a planetarium projection panel, passing through a camera to form a huge night sky. The other streets all used the same color so it gave one the impression of moving into a starry sea.

From the floor to the ceiling, passing through the planetarium screen and acting as the support to the underground street was the lobby. Speaking of which, the roof of the underground street was like the ceiling of a sports hall, supported by a large amount of metal frames, scattering the weight. However, this architecture alone didn't seem able to support its own weight, so a lot more ways were used to support it.

Index continued to sit in the side car as she looked around.

“Is this really the underground!? There's even a flowing river and forest!!”

“For the forest, they used an agriculture tower to grow them. Besides purifying the air, they also have an important role in providing a sense of serenity to humans. And the water is one of the most important sources of electricity. It passes through the entire level, and each level uses this falling water power to generate electricity from water power.”

It sure felt like today's Itsuwa was playing the role of a guide girl on a tour bus in Academy City.

Index tilted her head and asked,

“Itsuwa, why is there a need for so much electrical energy?”

“Uh hmm... most of the energy is used to pump air in. Absorbing oxygen in from the surface, removing the carbon dioxide accumulated below. This is a must. Also there's a need to pump rainwater and wastewater up. So considering all of that, there's a need to pump them all out. 40% of the electricity consumed in Academy City is put into these large air pumps. Regarding that, it seems that they're using a real life bottlecap-like effect.”

“As more than half of Academy City's electricity is generated by wind, no matter how much energy they use, there's no need to worry about fuel consumption and environmental destruction. But in contrast to other countries, while people are voicing out about oil prices rising, creating a street that relies primarily on fossil fuels isn't realistic... Additionally, while Academy City is limited in land space, those countries with wide acres of land don't even need to build any underground streets.”

(Well, if the research is successful, then other problems would crop up if we were to really market this.)

The motorbike with a side wheel continued to move forward on this starry night.

Kamijou, who was sitting in the back seat, pointed at the electrical decorations on the tower far away.

“Hm? Oi, Itsuwa, that entertainment bathhouse you talked about, is it over there?”

“Ah, it looks that way.”

“But that place sure seems busy recently.”

“Eh, you’re right. It seems to be ranked 3 among all bathhouses.”

“...Is this kind of information really needed in an escort battle against Acqua?” Though Kamijou was puzzled, Itsuwa didn’t mind.

“Is there a problem?”

“No... actually, in this famous place, I feel that I might meet someone familiar there.”

Part 8

Misaka Mikoto stopped, roughly seeing the huge building in front of her.

This building that shot through the floor of District 22 to the ceiling was the Super Resort Serene Springs. Basically speaking, this entire building was the hot spring. Every level had all sorts of different herbs, electrical power, sonic waves; all kinds of pools were available there. Even so, it still had space for a shopping district, like a karaoke center, a bowling alley, etc.

In contrast to the old context of bathhouses, calling this a bathhouse-styled relaxation zone would be more appropriate. The place was targeted (opening this in Academy City, where the majority were students, was also one of the reasons) at the 10+ year-old boys and girls, and so the design matched the age group.

As this was an entertainment-based facility, there was of course a VIP pool. However, Mikoto wasn’t aiming for that.

“...An out-of-bath Gekota strap...”

If one was able to accumulate 10 collection cards with stamps on them, they could receive this gift. For this, Mikoto had come all the way over to this Super Resort Serene Springs. If it hadn’t been for this strap, she wouldn’t have purposely broken the dormitory curfew and ran out, shaking off Shirai Kuroko, who had tailed her, before coming all the way here.

(Well, it's alright to bring Kuroko along...but if I were to tell her that I was coming here to bathe, she'd cling onto me like a snake...)

This image appeared in Mikoto's mind, making her feel a chill up her spine. She shook her head around to get rid of this terrifying idea and entered the building. Upon entering, what appeared in front of her was the lobby — there didn't seem to be a reception point, as the payment areas were all at the entrance to each bath area.

There was a group of people fanning themselves and there were also children, who had gotten sick of the bath area, playing around at the game corner. After passing through these crowds of people, Mikoto reached the elevator.

“Now, where shall I collect these stamps...”

She had passed through the ultrasonic bath area; as an Electromaster, she had no need to especially use those electrical bath pools. Through this elimination, all that was left was just some basic baths with a higher composition of herbs. Medicinal effects, though the way it was phrased made one suspicious, it was just a scientific method of analyzing the composition of the water, and then adjusting the composition of the artificial pool to have the same effects.

“Can't you just say that you just added a bit of some bathing agents?”

Mikoto said such explicit words as she took the elevator to the 8th level. At the entrance to the bathhouse, she paid some money, borrowed a towel, quickly took her clothes off in the changing area, wrapped her body in the light-colored bath towel, locked her items up, and finished her preparation for this operation.

(...It's unexpectedly short.)

The bottom of the bath towel just reached near her thighs. Though Mikoto was mindful about that, she still opened the door to the huge bathroom.

One couldn't even sense the height of this tower. There were no windows, not a single one. In District 22, even if there were windows, it'd just be a wide space. If this place had been in the mountains, it would have been okay; but in the middle of a city, setting up windows in a woman's bathroom just to allow them to see the scenery was like committing suicide.

The bathroom's setup was very similar to traditional ones. There were three bath pools, set according to the water temperature. The wall had an oil-painted Mount Fuji on it... well, no such thing. Replacing it was a large magnetic particle color screen. It was said that the selling point of this screen was that it allowed the particles to change colors immediately and to, without the need for external light, be able to display all sorts of colors, but the price was exorbitantly high. Besides, an ordinary television screen that people used now wasn't much of a problem, so besides a handful of artists and cinemas, there hadn't been many buyers; it was somewhat of a very tragic item.

The screen looked like it also had a touchscreen function, as 2 to 3 children were chattering “There really is, I’m saying that a white angel really appeared.” “No way that’s possible.” “Really! They probably hid all the bad things!” as they continued to draw on the screen. The females watching the night serial drama through a small window on the screen were also doing the same.

Mikoto arrived at a row of shower taps and sat down in front of one of them, gently held onto the tap with a sensor on it, and after a few seconds, the number ‘38°C’ appeared on the screen. Over here, the machine would use one’s palm to detect body temperature before setting it at the most suitable temperature for the customer to shower.

(If I want to get all the stamps, I might as well go into every bath for a few seconds and then go into the next one, and then repeat — how about it? Hmm... that doesn’t really seem like the best way... I should have risked it and asked Kuroko over to get 2 persons’ worth of stamps. No, that’s not right...!?)

Mikoto considered all these as she bathed herself, and then used hot water to wash away the soap bubbles.

(Speaking of which, I’ve only collected about half of the number required; still a long way to go for the bath Gekota.)

In truth, Mikoto didn’t really like baths that were too hot, thus among the three bath compartments, she headed to the most kiddy-looking one.

At this moment, Mikoto froze.

In front of her was the silver-haired, green-eyed nun who she had seen so many times before.

“AH, EHHH!? WHY ARE YOU HERE!?”

Mikoto couldn’t help but shriek, but Index, who was soaking in the clear pool, placed her index finger near her lips.

“...Be quiet while you’re in the bath!”

Now that she mentioned it, this sure was the case. Mikoto shut up and carefully stepped into the bath pool.

This time, Index said again,

“...Don’t put your towel inside the water!”

As a Japanese person, for Mikoto to unexpectedly be lectured by a foreigner regarding bathhouse etiquette, this really deflated her. Mikoto took off her towel and let the bath

water rise to her shoulders. At this moment, she noticed the double-eyelid girl beside Index, remembering clearly her special characteristic.

No, she couldn't say that she knew that girl.

“Oh yeah, you're that girl who got hugged by that idiot because of some strange soccer ball, right!!?”

Now that Mikoto suddenly mentioned this, the girl with her eyes shut let out a ‘GUAH!!’ shout and blushed, her hands waving about as she said ‘No, it's not that, nonono, I, I, I, I-I...!!’, trying to make a decent excuse but unable to say anything of the sort. On the other side, the foreign nun slightly opened her mouth, revealing her shiny fangs inside.

But Mikoto didn't hear anything of what the ordinary girl said.

She stared at the girl who was waving her arms about, leaving her defenseless, making a hypothesis as she looked through the clear water.

(Seems to be unexpectedly big...)

Considering that her only choice was to admit defeat willingly, Mikoto's jaw dropped. Although still hidden in the slightly-colored water, if this ordinary girl stood up from the water, it would instantly bring Mikoto despair.

The ordinary girl continued to chatter, softly yet quickly. Seeing her, Mikoto remembered,

(Speaking of which, do these children know about that idiot's ‘issue’?)

Memory loss.

Mikoto herself had only just found out about it recently. Since when had he lost his memory? How had it happened? She didn't know any of these specific details. Piecing two and two together, it seemed that the idiot himself wanted to hide the fact about his memory loss... Mikoto could only make this hypothesis.

(These guys...they...don't know about his memory loss.)

Mikoto sneakily looked at their expression. Of course, not being a mind reader meant that even if she did this, she couldn't understand what they were thinking.

Mikoto let her body soak in the water as she pondered.

“(Speaking of which, this is all because of that idiot, and I'm just a complete stranger. No matter how much I think about it, there won't be any developments... even though I understand, but... Speak-speaking of which, why must I be so troubled by that idiot; if I feel that it's troublesome, shouldn't I stop caring about it glup glup glup glup glup glup glup glup...)”

“AH, EHHH? SHORT-HAIR’S SINKING INTO THE HOT WATER!!!?”

“SHE’LL DROWN!!! WE NEED TO SAVE HER!!!”



“?”

Kamijou, coming out of the bath first, was standing in front of the vending machine. He was wondering whether he should go for ice milk coffee or ice cream. At this moment, ‘patapatapatapatapatapata,’ he heard footsteps and turned his head back.

All he saw was a female doctor running out from the resuscitation room to the female pool. Of course, he didn’t know what was going on inside.

Part 9

After passing through a time of relaxation, the happy time of bathing was now over.

Kamijou walked out of the relaxation bathing tower and was now standing at the main entrance of the building. He wasn’t there to smoke, but to get some night wind.

“...I completely forgot that this is an underground street.”

After standing there for quite a while, there still hadn’t been any wind. Realizing this, Kamijou couldn’t help but feel disappointed.

Even so, he was considering something.

A man from the deepest organization within the Roman Catholic Church’s God’s Right Seat, Acqua of the Back, had sent a letter of challenge over... There wasn’t anything critical yet, but even if he opened the box and peeked inside, there wasn’t anything special going on.

(Is he just bluffing...? No, it’s too early to conclude that.)

At this moment, Itsuwa, who was fragrant after bathing, slowly approached a frustrated Kamijou.

“You’ll get cold if you stay in such a place.”

“No, I need to get some blood to my head, so this should be good.”

“Well, we’re using the motorbike to get back anyway. If we consider the time now, we’ll definitely get colds.”

After being lectured by Itsuwa in such a conservative manner, Kamijou looked dejected.

Seeing him like this, Itsuwa couldn’t help but chuckle.

“How about a walk together?”

“You’re the one who said that we’ll get cold, Itsuwa!!”

“We’ll get cold anyway, so I feel that it’s alright. Also, if you really want, why don’t you go back into the baths again later? There are many baths for you to play around in, like a swimming pool.”

This really is a rather good wonderland, Kamijou thought.

To be honest, it was lonely for a man to bathe by himself.

“Oh yeah, where’s Index?”

“It seems like she said that she wanted to look around the food tasting area in the food space.”

If Kamijou asked Index whether she wanted to go for a walk when Index was like this, he would likely be bitten by her iron fangs the moment he said it. *Since she won’t leave the food tasting area, there’s no need to worry about her getting lost,* Kamijou made an apt conclusion.

(...Besides, it’s better to ask Itsuwa all sorts of things regarding Acqua.)

Acqua of the Back may arrive in Academy City, and besides, Kamijou had kept this a secret from Index. This time, Acqua’s target was Kamijou alone, so Kamijou wanted to try his best to avoid getting Index involved a dangerous situation.

Therefore Kamijou and Itsuwa started to talk as they began this night stroll.

In this uniformly blue-ridden night scene, the street felt like the scales of a butterfly from a southern country, and yet it also looked like underwater coral reefs. Maybe because their bodies were still hot from the baths, the scene in front didn’t look all that icy cold.

“Speaking of which, the Amakusa have moved from Japan to England, right?”

“Mm, yes.”

“So how’s life in England?”

“Mm...”

Itsuwa pondered while she faced Kamijou.

“Even though we moved to London, we’ve been entrusted with the Japanese street area, so basically there isn’t too much of a change. Our daily meals there are the same as in Japan.”

“Eh? Is that so?”

“Mm...”

Itsuwa again revealed an ambiguous smile, and after pausing for a while,

“Actually, the Amakusa is a group that learns about all the surroundings and thinks of the most suitable ways to blend into the surroundings, so our reaction to arriving in a foreign land so suddenly isn’t much different from ordinary people.”

In other words, Itsuwa and company had chosen to go to the Japanese street not because they were bogged down by Japanese habits, but because they could only choose to go somewhere where, even if there was a group of Japanese, they wouldn’t feel oppressed. The feeling one got was like a mix of Eastern and Western cultures.

“The Anglican Church treats us rather well. Of course, it’s just an Amakusa feeling, but living in London is really interesting,”

Itsuwa said this with a smile, but things shouldn’t be that simple.

Because the Anglican Church couldn’t head out to settle all problems due to political reasons, before they could finally mobilize, the Amakusa would act on their own, and once something went wrong, they would be abandoned like a lizard’s tail. Kamijou had seen things like this happen numerous times. Being under the umbrella of a large organization, sometimes they would be assigned work due to convenience.

“Is that so?”

But Kamijou swallowed these thoughts and only gave a simple reply.

Itsuwa wasn’t giving just a simple smile, but one could still tell that she was happy with how she was treated.

“Say, the Amakusa is originally like those ordinary sects that blend into the street culture anyway.”

“Mm, besides, that’s our goal.”

“You’re right.”

Kamijou Touma reconfirmed Itsuwa's attire.

Right now, she had a pink tanktop over her brightly-colored sheep-like sweatshirt. Her dark pants were like cloth wrapped on legs, and there were large gaps in between. A transparent vinyl was used to hold it together.

“So are the people in London dressed *like that*?”

“Ah, um, right now, this get-up is chosen under the condition of ‘settling the problem in Academy City’.”

“Does it really look indecent...?” Seeing Itsuwa sink into discomfort, Kamijou could only casually shake his head.

This seemed to calm her down quite a bit.

“Though it's a bit harder to explain it in words, but, well, I'll choose a more mature look when I'm in London.”

“Well basically, I don't know the clothing brands in Academy City, but the designs over there do feel a bit stiff, right?”

“Well, that's not really the case. The people over there don't just like domestic products; on the contrary, it's dangerous to choose that... Besides, even if there are people wearing the same things, the different characteristics and actions can thoroughly change a person's overall image, you know?”

Though Itsuwa was trying her best to explain this, since her entire attire was based on feeling, it was very hard to explain it in theory. It was like someone saying that he was teaching how to ride a bike, but not teaching anything besides how to get on the bike, no further explanation.

Thus, Kamijou was a bit mindful of Itsuwa's image in London.

At this moment, Kamijou remembered that beside Itsuwa, there was another familiar person among the Amakusa.

Kanzaki Kaori.

“—But isn't Kanzaki's attire weird as well?”

“EH!? WHAT—ARE—YOU SAYING — STRANGE AS IN...?”

“Though her get-up does look adult-like, that should be classified as sexy, right?”

“YOU, YOU SUDDENLY GAVE A SHOCKING COMMENT ABOUT THE PRIESTESS!? THAT ISN'T BECAUSE IT'S OBSCENE, BUT RATHER THE SPELL COMPOSITION

THAT REQUIRES ASYMMETRY!! IT WAS DELIBERATELY MADE LIKE THAT TO ALLOW THE BALANCE ON BOTH SIDES BE USED EVEN MORE EFFECTIVELY, AND NOT MEANT TO DELIBERATELY SHOW OFF THE CURVES ON HER BODY OR WHATSOEVER—!!”

HA!? At this moment, Itsuwa finally reverted back to normal.

Seeing the change in this late-blooming girl that had her two hands clenched and placed in front of her chest, Kamijou tried to pull her back, saying,

“Then, well, so to Itsuwa and the rest, it seems like ‘coming to London was the best choice’, right?”

“??? Well, we’re really happy to be living on the same land as the Priestess.”

The way Kamijou suddenly changed the topic caused Itsuwa to remain dazed for a while.

“...Well, as the distance is too far, it’s a pity that I can’t immediately see the person I want to see when the person’s in Japan...”

She continued to walk beside Kamijou, her vision slowly turning downwards, her mouth muttering.

“...But, recently, things are alright. That, it’s like Vega and Altair...”²

“? What now, Itsuwa?”

“NO, NOTHING!! NOTHING AT ALL!!!”

Kamijou stared at Itsuwa as he questioned a blank Itsuwa, and Itsuwa blushed as she started to wave her hands.

Part 10

With Tatemiya Saiji leading the pack, the Amakusa members were standing slightly far away from Kamijou and Itsuwa’s position. They were not gathered at one spot, but scattered all around with Kamijou at center, looking around at the surrounding lanes, continuing to move around at a similar speed as Kamijou. And even so, they continued to blend with into the surroundings; it was hard to tell who they were protecting. If that happened, an observing VIP guard expert would be shocked by it. Besides, the Amakusa’s skills were a lot better than those experts, so they were not likely to be found out.

² Refers to the Qixi Festival, which tells of a love story between Vega and Altair.

The Amakusa had been commanded by the Anglican Church to carry out this mission, and with Tatemiya leading, the group of teenagers continued to move down the street (or pretending to be). They were lined up on a karaoke relaxation street, occasionally looking like they were going into some shops and pretending to look into some shops, continuing to maintain their distance from Kamijou and Itsuwa as they moved around.

“So what do you think, substitute Supreme Pontiff?”

Ushibuka asked.

“About Itsuwa’s ‘abandon Index and have a night date’ battle?”

“I’m talking about Acqua of the Back.”

Ushibuka’s short and simple sentence made Tatemiya’s expression change.

He slightly looked around for a while.

“Up till now, there hasn’t been any signs of invasion, and Academy City hasn’t received any similar reports, but,”

“...Well, we still can’t believe it, huh?”

“In this situation, there’s a double meaning to not being able to believe it.”

Tatemiya revealed an evil smile.

“First, it’s that Academy City’s security itself has holes that the magic side can exploit, so it can’t be trusted. The other one is—why would the higher-ups of Academy City choose to hide this information? So, Ushibuka, which one do you believe?”

“Well...”

“For just Kamijou Touma alone, the three sides—Academy City, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church—are all racking their brains as they come up with plans. By itself, this scenario is already peculiar.”

“Substitute Supreme Pontiff.”

“Mm, I understand. To us Amakusa, just the name Kamijou Touma alone is worth protecting, because he’s not just our savior, but our comrade as well.

But at this point, Tatemiya paused.

“But what’s Kamijou Touma to Academy City? What’s Kamijou Touma to the Anglican Church? What’s Kamijou Touma to God’s Right Seat of the Roman Catholic Church...? Is he someone that such a huge thing like an organization has to take action against?”

With Tatemiya as centerpoint, the small band of familiar people remained silent.

It was not that they didn't understand the answer.

It was that even though they thought of it, they were afraid to say it out loud.

"...There are a few hypotheses we can make."

Tatemiya finally said,

"But, that thing... Kamijou Touma's value, is it the same to all three of these organizations? We can't make any developments if we just consider this. It seems like there's a lot of hidden information that we don't know of."

"Substitute Supreme Pontiff..."

"If we really want to protect Kamijou Touma, we may have to investigate those things as well. We can't just be happy with forcing the attackers to retreat. We have to directly take down 'the guy that sent those attackers'."

Speaking so far, Tatemiya Saiji suddenly paused.

He felt constricted.

The thing that had vanished was a human. From who knew when, the only ones walking down this street were Tatemiya and company. Seemed like he had controlled the crowd flow through some means, and could even use a highly-skilled technique of 'blending into the surroundings' like the Amakusa.

"..."

There was not even a need to say a single word.

Tatemiya gave a few movement signals to discreetly give his orders, and the teenagers of the Amakusa quickly reached for their hidden weapons.

It was a feeling of constriction.

This feeling was like the huge columns of air whipped up when a subway train moved near a train station. Just like when a huge thing got near, there would be shockwaves or something similar to that.

Tatemiya looked over at the source of this constricting feeling.

What was over there was...

Part 11

Kamijou and Itsuwa were slowly walking down an underground street that was completely covered in blue. Different from the other streets, the view here was specially tailored. A uniform night scene would bore one if they continued to look in the same place, but overall, it still looked pretty.

At this moment, Itsuwa, who was walking on, suddenly said, “He hasn’t made a move yet, that Acqua.”

“...Maybe he got tangled in Academy City’s security. Hehe, there won’t be such good fortune.”

As they had been very relaxed, they had forgotten all about it, but the pressing issue now was still God’s Right Seat.

Though Anti-Skill of Academy City weren’t idiots, they had let some magicians invade Academy City in some battles between magicians. Having seen all of these, Kamijou wasn’t going to just let them handle it all...besides, after the battle against Vento of the Front, Acqua himself had invaded Academy City to bring her back.

Though the Amakusa’s reinforcements were very reliable, once there was some political problem, they would definitely be cut off like a lizard’s tail, so their actions weren’t as limited. This was something that was to be expected, even without anyone saying it, because if the Anglican Church didn’t care about all of these and were going to go all out just to beat Acqua, they would have immediately sent Kanzaki over.

The moment the topic was changed, the entire blue atmosphere changed as well. Maybe it was a coincidence or something, but the color that signified Acqua of the Back seemed to be blue.

“Though the fact that I’m not being attacked should be something to be happy about...”

She didn’t know how to decide on this, as Itsuwa’s tone indicated that she was a bit nervous.

While continuing to walk on this blue street, Kamijou pondered for a while,

“Maybe he’s doing something secretly, maybe something happened.”

Up till now, the two members of God’s Right Seat who had attacked... Vento of the Front and Terra of the Left had both used completely different methods of attacking. One brashly had come attacking right from the front, while the other had let the world sink into chaos and made one huge detour to attack Academy City.

He could only use those two as examples, so it was hard to pin down the methods of God's Right Seat. Besides, Vento and Terra's actions had both been too extreme, so it was impossible to use them as reference.

"Anyway, we can't just let down our guard so easily..."

Itsuwa again clenched her little fist.

"Including the substitute Supreme Pontiff, everyone's working hard in ways that we can't see. No matter who's here, the fact that we will use all our strength to complete our mission won't change. Just treat this as what we do all the time; there's no need to be mindful about this."

"What you do all the time, huh?"

On hearing Itsuwa's words, Kamijou forced a smile.

"...Speaking of which, I'm supposed to be targeted by this really huge group called God's Right Seat, and yet I'm forced to come to this relaxation facility because my heater got spoilt. I do feel bad about bothering other people..."

"No, it's not that. I don't think that everyone feels that way,"

Itsuwa quickly waved her hands as she interrupted Kamijou.

"Even if we know that a strong enemy's about to come, we'll be very fatigued mentally if we continue to remain alert. We have to properly rest up in order to be able to use all our strength at the critical moment: this is very important. Thus it's very important for us to relax now. Trying to force oneself to live in one's own special rhythm isn't going to work. It's the same thing as putting freshwater fish in seawater."

It's that kind of a thing, huh? Kamijou felt puzzled.

Neither of them really planned on a path for their stroll. Index would definitely choose to join the fight if they were to talk about Acqua right in front of her, thus they had decided to keep it a secret from her. They had already said what they wanted to say, and now they had reached a place where they could see a river. Kamijou's plan was to use the metal bridge to pass over the river, and make a round before heading back to where they had come from through another path.

"Speaking of which, about the other Amakusa members, you're talking about Tatemiya and the rest?"

"Mm, yes. They should be somewhere nearby, watching and protecting us." Itsuwa said in a seemingly regretful tone, "...If the Priestess were here, her strength alone would be equivalent to 100 people."

“We’re talking about Kanzaki here, right? She is really strong.”

“Yes, yes! Because the Priestess is one of the Saints, and there are only 20 of them! No matter what, we only need the Priestess to finish them off in one hit!”

Hoho, is that so, Kamijou suitably replied to Itsuwa.

“Well, since she could fight against an archangel like Power of God, she is truly strong, that Kanzaki.”

“EHYAAHEH!? SHE FOUGHT AGAINST AN A-ARCHANGEL!? WHAT HAPPENED...!?”

Oh? This reaction shocked Kamijou. That had been during the Angel Fall incident, so Itsuwa may not have known. However, she seemed to have heard from Tsuchimikado that he had intruded upon Kanzaki changing clothes... but it seemed like regarding this Angel Fall incident, Kamijou didn’t really remember much of it.

“Hmm...” Kamijou scratched his head.

“No matter whether it’s a Saint or an Angel, both are really strong. There are a lot of strong people out there in this world.”

“This, well, it isn’t really a critical evaluation...”

Itsuwa looked like she hadn’t recovered from the shock.

“No matter what, if we compare an angel against a Saint, an angel is still stronger.”

“Really? Then does that mean that Kanzaki can’t beat an angel no matter how much she tries?”

“That, that is really a tough question... it’s just that, in terms of raw power, an angel is still stronger. The power that a Saint has is different in nature when compared to an angel.”

Based on Itsuwa’s explanation, humans that were Saints were limited in how much power they could use. If they were to even barely try to surpass that limit, they may end up self-destructing. Among the scholars in the magic side, there were many different explanations regarding ‘why can an angel retain so much power and yet not go amok’?

“Damn it, my head hurts now that we’re talking about studying; it’s the same no matter which side.”

“Though I’m just saying this generally, basically, that information can be trusted...”

Seeing as Itsuwa’s shoulders sink as she sighed, it seemed that she was really trying her best in every single aspect.

“Back to what we’re talking about, you said that Kanzaki couldn’t help, but aren’t both Kanzaki and the Amakusa affiliated to the Anglican Church? They should arrive if you ask, right?”

“Probably...I guess. Though we’re together, a Saint is like a nuke’s existence, so it seems that they can’t just allow her to act outside England. Besides, there are many things that the Amakusa can’t say, so we can’t just ask her like that... well, regarding this, it’s still something of a taboo...”

While talking about this, Kamijou and Itsuwa stepped onto the metal bridge.

The entire length of the metal bridge was about 50 meters.

Speaking of the size of the bridge, it wasn’t very big; considering that the river underneath was man-made, one would somehow lament about it.

This was a lit part as well. The entire bridge was all blue.

“(…Though I know I can’t let down my guard, but, just the two of us... WAAAAHHH...)”

“What’s wrong, Itsuwa?”

“N-NOTHING!! NOTHING AT ALL!! ISN’T THERE NOTHING GOING ON!!?”

Itsuwa immediately raised her petite hands to rapidly swing them in front of her face, left and right.

“That, that that that that, I just thought that there wasn’t really anyone around; and it’s now just two of us. It’s rare to see this place being decorated so nicely, it, it’s such a waste...”

Kamijou started to feel puzzled as both of them continued to walk on the metal bridge.

Why did Itsuwa start to talk really fast and start smiling happily?

“Well, it should be because of the time now, right? Night time in Academy City is like this. The last trains and buses are deliberately set so early so that students won’t go out to play till late. But then again, there’ll be guys who go out to play all the same.”

Though he said it, both of them immediately felt a sense of constriction.

It was past 10 PM now, and the main forms of transport had all ceased.

According to the timing, it was nothing strange for the traffic flow to change as well. Besides, this was Academy City, where students made up 80% of the population.

However,

If it was just past 10 PM, those groups of people who wanted to play should be playing outside as usual.

(Oh, crap...!?)

Facing this *unnatural scene without people*, Kamijou felt a sense of ominous danger. He immediately decided to tell Itsuwa that the situation now was extremely dangerous.

But he couldn't do it.

Because he didn't even have time to do it.

“—I did warn you before.”

He heard a voice.

From in front of them, coming from the silhouette of a person within the darkness shaped by the blue illumination, a stout man's voice could be heard.

“—There were many paths in front of you that you could have chosen.”

They heard footsteps.

But these footsteps didn't sound human. Every time the person took a step, *PAM...!!* the metal bridge below slightly tremored. One thing about the oppressive weight was that it could also be considered as a countdown to death. The blue darkness slowly let out sounds of strange footsteps, as if telling the opponent his unwillingness.

Itsuwa was dumbstruck by this sudden situation, revealing an expression that lacked tension, but...Kamijou immediately reacted. What happened to the contact with the main Amakusa forces? Shouldn't they have been hiding somewhere in the darkness and protecting Kamijou and Itsuwa?

“—If, after receiving my declaration, you had thought through it and felt that ‘this’ choice is worth risking, I'll use all my strength to directly crush you.”

But the voice became a mocking one.

“—But really, don't you have any better options?”

The darkness scattered away.

Anyway, the only light source was the dim street light, and thus it was not something that could chase away the strong light of the night sky. But even though the man was slowly approaching from within the darkness far away, just like this, it felt like the darkness was avoiding the man.



Brown hair, a straight-lined face that looked as if it had been chiseled from stone, a shirt that had blue as the base color and was similar to a polo shirt. Though he looked muscular, it was not the feeling that a bodybuilder gave, but rather, one of a soldier that had gone through many bloody and gory battles.

“You’re...”

It was not an unfamiliar face.

Once before—on the 30th of September, Kamijou Touma had met this man in Academy City.

After he had finally managed to use the Imagine Breaker to defeat Vento of the Front in an arduous battle, this brawny man had come rushing in.

“Acqua of the Back. I should have introduced myself before.”

God’s Right Seat.

And at the same time, he had the abilities of a Saint.

“Just as you declared? You mean—”

“I don’t need to think up some special plan,”

Acqua simply said.

“I came here with a purpose, and that’s to eradicate the mastermind behind all the unrest in the world.”

And you dare to say it, Kamijou silently cursed.

Vento of the Front had caused all the functions in the city to be paralyzed. Terra of the Left started commotions all over the world. No matter what reasons they had, he shouldn’t be treated by God’s Right Seat as a scapegoat.

“You don’t have any intention to negotiate? You’re intending to kill me right from the start?”

“Humph, we may have been too hasty.”

Acqua seemed a bit bored as he measured up Kamijou.

“My wish is to eradicate the mastermind behind all the chaos in the world.”

“What do you mean by chaos?”

“You won’t admit it anyway.”

“Even if there is, you’re the ones who started it!! Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten about what all of your people did in Avignon!!”

“Even that is because of that incident, there’s also the reason of ‘attacking the dangerous parties of Kamijou Touma and Academy City’.”

While both sides were in a deadlock, Acqua didn’t waver in the slightest.

This meant that he had never intended to hear Kamijou Touma out.

“All of those things happened because your body has some special thing. Therefore, I won’t be taking your life—as long as you hand that right hand over to me, cutting it off before me, I’ll spare that pitiful mongrel life of yours.”

Truly a request that one couldn’t respond to.

Acqua probably made this request knowing that he would be refused.

“What about the main Amakusa force...”

At this moment, Itsuwa finally said something.

This seemed to indicate something, as Itsuwa looked around.

“It’s useless.”

Acqua interrupted her action with just this sentence alone.

“What happened to my comrades?”

“I didn’t kill them,”

Acqua simply said.

“The ones I want to take down aren’t them,”

While saying this, Acqua slightly shifted his body.

The distance between them was about 10m. From here, one could see that Acqua wasn’t holding anything like a weapon, and it didn’t look like he was hiding anything under his clothes. The polo shirt was supported by the muscular body, and it didn’t look like there was any space to hide any weapons.

Even so, Kamijou and Itsuwa concentrated all their nerves, not even letting their sights off Acqua's movements. This battle couldn't be avoided, and because they knew this, they wouldn't recklessly attack, but would choose to fight back at the right time and deliver the decisive blow.

But then...

From the side.

"Gh!?"

Before Kamijou could swallow his breath, Acqua was already beside Itsuwa. He had vanished: Acqua's speed could only be seen as such. Sneaking into Itsuwa's arms, Acqua swung his elbow to attack Itsuwa's face from the side.

Not even a single sound.

But Kamijou's vision finally caught up with Itsuwa's body that had been sent flying through the pedestrian walkway and onto the road. Kamijou himself couldn't even breathe, yet even so, he tried to use all the remaining air in his lungs. Basically, he instinctively shouted,

"Itsuwa!?"

"You still have the time to worry about others, do you?"

Acqua's voice covered Kamijou's shout.

Finally, *BOOM!!* a sound reached Kamijou's ear. The sound came from within the shadow of Acqua dragging his feet. Like a huge tiger shark leaping out of the surface of the sea, a huge piece of metal came out from within Acqua's shadow. A 5m-long unknown object; in shape, it looked like a lance that a European knight would use, but that was wrong.

It was like a huge umbrella created from a steel structure used to construct a building.

It was a mace intended for killing.

"I'm coming, my prey."

"DAMN!!"

Before Kamijou could get into the correct posture, Acqua's muscles expanded explosively.

(EVADE!!) Before his mind could give an order, the huge mace came slamming down from above.

It was a miracle that he was still alive. Itsuwa's bag had come flying over and collided with Kamijou's body, causing him to fall away in a direction completely opposite of what Acqua had anticipated. Because of that, Kamijou was able to keep his life.

The approximately 5 meter-long metal mace missed its target and easily crushed Itsuwa's bag to bits, afterwards landing on the floor like a guillotine blade.

It was supposed to be a metal bridge reinforced with cement.

But with this heavy and blunt sound, the entire metal bridge shook due to the impact. The screws that held the metal bridge down broke and make lots of noises. The blue lights used to light the place up lost their glow unnaturally. However, Kamijou didn't have time to notice all of those. Like a meteor colliding with the sea, with Acqua's mace as the center, a large amount of concrete debris flew all over the place, and some of it hit Kamijou's body.

“GGYYYYAAAAHHH!!?”

Just the aftershock of this attack alone was enough to cause Kamijou to be unable to take a step forward.

Just as Kamijou felt that his legs were both light and floating, his body had already flown back several meters. His back hit one of the metal frames supporting the bridge, finally causing his body to stop moving.

There was a *clack clack* sound.

The small pieces of concrete fragments were falling onto the bridge like rain.

Acqua placed the mace that looked as heavy as a metal frame on his shoulder, moving forward to Kamijou, who was on the floor.

Although it was powder, it looked like a visible battle aura as it surrounded Acqua before being scattered away.

At this moment, his eyes looked off to the side.

The person who was trying her best to even stand up was Itsuwa. Maybe she had pulled it out before she threw the bag, but Itsuwa had already assembled the Friuli spear that could be dissembled anytime, the cross tip of the spear pointing at Acqua.

But Itsuwa had most likely taken a lot of damage from the initial hit. Red liquid was left on her lips, and her face that had been hit was all red as well. Even so, right now, Itsuwa looked like she might as well go do some casual fishing.

Acqua didn't even smile.

He just warned, “You have an enemy that even an entire group couldn’t take down, and against such an opponent, you think you have a chance of winning?”

“...Even if it’s me...I have my own determination.”

Now, how much heavy emotion and realizations were put into this one sentence?

In contrast, Acqua just replied, “Is that so?”

Just that.

(Oh no...!!)

Kamijou tried to force his aching body to get between Itsuwa and Acqua. But in stark contrast to his thoughts, his body couldn’t move. During this time, Itsuwa and Acqua began fighting at close range.

Itsuwa’s movements were fast.

However, Acqua was fast to the point that he was basically disappearing. By the time he became aware, the huge metal mace had already sunk deeply into Itsuwa’s flank. After that, Acqua changes where he was facing, and using centrifugal force, he tossed Itsuwa to where Kamijou was.

React, this thought didn’t even appear in Kamijou’s brain.

With the metal mace’s weight and a person’s weight, Kamijou was completely sandwiched in between while his back was still against the metal frame. All the air in his lungs was forced out, and there was even a little smell of rusted metal in it. Several seconds later, the impacted body floated up from the ground, and afterwards, the impact would make one feel that the Earth’s gravity had been increased by numerous folds as it surrounded Kamijou’s body. Kamijou slowly fell onto the ground.

Itsuwa, who was on top of him, didn’t react at all. Though Kamijou wanted to push Itsuwa away, he couldn’t do it.

His vision was slowly becoming blurry, finally catching a glimpse of Acqua with much difficulty.

(The difference...is too great...)

Whether it was Vento of the Front or Terra of the Left, at least he could see their actions. As long as he could react to their attacks and make the suitable counters, at least he could land a few hits on them.

(But what on earth is this guy...) Kamijou wondered.

Acqua of the Back.

Was this guy really a fellow human?

This wasn't a difference between one human and another. It was just like an online RPG where you were fighting someone that was 100 levels higher. It was not that he made the attacks obsolete through some trick, but rather, fighting through pure ability, there was no way he could win.

"Your right hand,"

Acqua, slowly raising his mace, said.

"If you hand it over, I'll spare your life."

"You...must be...joking..."

Though he wanted to stand up, his body couldn't muster any strength.

Knowing that he was at his limit, Kamijou still didn't give up.

However...

"Really? If so, I'll let you understand the harsh reality even more."

Part 12

(Ugh...)

Itsuwa's consciousness had vanished for a while.

Like water seeping into soil, she slowly regained her consciousness. The first thing she noticed was a smell similar to rust, and then pain. While her brain realized these, the pain engulfed her body like a tsunami. Unexpectedly, the sight and hearing that one would normally rely on recovered last.

The surrounding darkness.

Being buried in the blue despair.

There was debris of asphalt and iron, the dust dancing above the metal bridge.

Up until a moment ago, both of them had been enjoying the night scene, but now it had become such a tragic sight.

And right now, she finally recognized the feeling of the spear in her hand.

“Hm!?”

Itsuwa suddenly remembered this scenario and frantically tried to use her spear to support herself up.

At this moment, she felt something warm flowing down her palm.

It was a bit warm, and had a bit of a rusty smell that could make anyone sick. And this fresh red fluid was very obvious.

Fresh blood.

But Itsuwa herself hadn’t bled that much, because if she had bled that much, it would be hard for her to retain consciousness. But this ink-like substance was different from any other fluid. It was definitely someone’s blood.

(Then whose blood is it?) Itsuwa considered, but in the next moment, she immediately denied her consciousness.

She knew without thinking about it.

It was Kamijou Touma’s blood.

“So you’re awake.”

If one were to calmly think this through, Acqua of the Back should be holding a weapon and behind her.

“Then move away from there. My one blow is too powerful, and if I freely exert all of my strength, the shockwaves will affect the surroundings.”

But Itsuwa’s consciousness wasn’t bothered by Acqua. Her shoulders trembled slightly and slowly, slowly turned behind her.

What had happened while Itsuwa was unconscious?

Having lost all his strength and lying on the ground, Kamijou’s limbs and face were both bloodied red. He couldn’t open his eyes, like an automatic door damaged and left in this half-open state. It should have been such an intense pain that it could rip his body apart, but Kamijou still didn’t move at all.

She couldn’t even comprehend it.

In terms of physical distance, they were both just a bit away from each other, but even with that little distance, Itsuwa still couldn’t tell.

“Ah...ah...”

Itsuwa’s judgment was slowly turning into dust.

This imminent threat called Acqua of the Back had vanished from her mind. Even against such a powerful foe, she didn’t care. She moved her hands that were dyed in other people’s blood, collecting the surrounding debris, taking out a wet handkerchief, and pulled out the wallet from a bloodied Kamijou’s pants pocket.

The magic that the Amakusa-style Remix-of-Church used didn’t require any strange spell or spiritual item.

The things used were basically everyday items.

Itsuwa was trying to find some unscientific leftovers from these everyday items, rearrange them in order to stop the bleeding, and cover the wounds in order to replenish his life force. In order to do this, Itsuwa was going to cast a healing spell. To this girl called Itsuwa, the problem and battle she was facing was all about whether she could save this boy.

Actually, even while Itsuwa was in a panic, she was still acting extremely fast.

It would be a moment before the recovery spell was activated.

Dim glowing little balls danced around above Kamijou’s body. The green glow looked like fireflies, and these glowing lights looked like they wanted to patch up the wounds as they entered them.

However,

A *BAM!!* sound could be heard.

The recovery spell that Itsuwa used scattered away like sawdust, not even a single bit left behind as it scattered.

The reason was obvious.

“...Uuu, ah.”

Itsuwa’s consciousness wavered as she turned her sight from Kamijou’s face to his right hand.

His right hand.

The Imagine Breaker.

No matter what supernatural power it was, this thing would negate the effects, whether good or bad.

Itsuwa's shouted out sounding like she was shaking her insides up and squeezing out every single ounce of air. Right now, she was not even thinking about the odds of winning. From her bloodshot eyes, one could tell that she didn't even have time to think about that.

She didn't want that person to die.

She didn't want that person to be taken away.

She wanted to stand up again.

She was just barely able to move because of that.

Spitting out bubbles of blood, Itsuwa's eyes showed a strong will that no one had ever seen before.

Acqua looked bored as he sighed.

He then slowly let the muscles of the arm gripping onto the mace expand. The terrifying muscles. The mace which was supposedly only made of iron. The large grip that would make one wonder whether the mace would break.

Acqua never treated Itsuwa as his enemy.

He just wanted to bury Itsuwa together with Kamijou in the next blow.

Itsuwa bit her own lips.

She couldn't even confirm all of these now.

And besides, she had no idea how much of a difference there even was between her and Acqua.

(...)

Slowly, Itsuwa turned silent.

It was not that she shut up. Right now, even her mind was silent. There was a mysterious blank in her heart. This may have been some sort of realization, or maybe she had given up. After she suddenly regained her thoughts, though the tip of her spear was shaking in an unstable manner, she charged towards Acqua head on.

The one hit that a dead man let out was simply a declaration of battle.

Itsuwa let her remaining ounce of strength gather at one spot.

The abrupt silence would be broken, and would bring about the final outcome.

“Thanks, Itsuwa.”

What broke Itsuwa’s will wasn’t Acqua’s blow.

But the soft palm of a certain boy placed on her shoulder.

Itsuwa’s petite body trembled because of this little action.

She was unable to turn back.

The hand that was placed on her shoulder should have been all battered.

But what appeared in Itsuwa’s mind was Kamijou’s smiling face.

“Thanks to your healing magic, I feel a bit better.”

That was impossible. His Imagine Breaker simply eradicated all forms of magic; Itsuwa’s recovery magic shouldn’t have had any effect at all.

In truth, the boy’s voice felt like toothpaste being squeezed out of a tube: extremely soft and still trembling. It felt like it could vanish at any moment.

Even so, that boy’s words were full of warmth.

Itsuwa’s body immediately softened gradually, but she also immediately realised what the boy was thinking and felt ominous about it.

Why would he choose to stand up at this point?

He couldn’t even move a finger, so why must he force himself to stand up now?

And also, there was meaning behind this hand that was stopping her from charging towards Acqua of the Back.

“Wai—!!”

Itsuwa didn’t even have a chance to let her voice out.

The boy exerted even more force on Itsuwa’s arm, and as if he wanted to switch positions with her, he moved forward. Having moved her battered body and seeing Kamijou’s back while he faced Acqua, Itsuwa was unable to stop him. Maybe it was because she didn’t know whether her lukewarm determination was shattered, but Itsuwa’s willpower, which had been supporting her body up until now, was all sucked out.

“WWWWWOOOOOOOOOHHHHH!!!”

No matter how much the boy was unused to fighting, he should understand that he couldn't beat Acqua.

That boy's aim wasn't to beat Acqua.

Acqua of the Back, in the beginning, he had said that his target was just Kamijou Touma. He also said that he hadn't killed the main Amakusa forces nearby. In other words, if this battle ended early, he wouldn't cause too much damage to the surroundings.

For example,

This could be settled without Itsuwa, who was nearby, dying.

"...ah!!"

Itsuwa could only see that back moving further and further away, her expression distorted.

The transparent fluid continued to flow out of her eyes.

No matter what Itsuwa shouted, Kamijou didn't look back.

Without looking back and running towards Acqua.

"Nice realization,"

Acqua of the Back just said this one sentence.

After that, in front of Itsuwa, he dealt a horrendous blow. The giant more-than-5m metal mace was swung horizontally, piercing into the boy's flank without mercy. The sound of this explosion would make one not expect that that thing was slammed into someone's body, and the boy who was sandwiched between the metal bridge and the mace had his strength slowly sapped away. He couldn't even swing his decisively clenched fist at Acqua.

This time, the boy finally lost consciousness as his body went limp onto the giant metal mace. It was like a blanket on a pole. Acqua saw the boy like this, and he smiled.

The smile seemed like he was praising the one who had lost.

He recognized the courage shown by the boy as he stood up for the girl who was behind him.

"I'm giving you one day."

Acqua swung the mace with the unconscious boy on it.

“It’d be too cruel of me to take off your arm without numbing you. Let’s consider this time for you to prepare a prosthetic. As long as you cut off the thing behind all this chaos—your right hand—and hand it over to us, I’ll spare your mongrel life.”

After saying that, Acqua swung his mace without hesitation.

As a member of God’s Right Seat, and also a Saint, it was a devastating strike released by a monster.

The boy’s body hanging on the mace flew off the metal bridge at a cannon-like speed, through the handles, colliding several times with the dark and icy surface of the water several hundred meters away. As it was too fast, the boy’s body bounced 2 to 3 times before sinking beside a cruise boat, causing the river water to pop up like a water pillar.

After a while, a huge explosion could be heard.

Without confirming whether his target was dead, Acqua turned his back on Itsuwa.

Finally, he said,

“Just one day.”

Between the Lines 1

What’s the problem? So you can’t sleep?

Then let this ol’ grandpa tell you a story, okay? Grandpa’s story is long and boring, so you can sleep nicely soon.

Alright, grandpa will tell you a story about an astrology group.

Ah, yes, that’s what it was called, but there’s not much difference to what it does now. We were helping others like what brats like you are doing now. Basically, we were a Christian magic group that followed others, and after understanding the situation, we’d use magic to settle it — it was that kind of an organization.

But there were a lot of people relying on us in the past. I’m not bluffing; there were many people within the country who were looking for us. Afterwards, as we had too many people relying on us, we couldn’t even stop at a single place. Us grandpas spent quite a few years slowly walking through the whole of Russia just to live.

After that, well, this thing called problems, it can happen anywhere.

Though I don't know whether it's because it's troublesome or because we can't help but interfere.

No, no, no, I'll explain to you first, the Russian Orthodox Church is all made up of bad people. However, that idiot wanted to turn a part of the Russian Orthodox Church as one part of him. Thus, the grandpas were forced to run away from those battle groups that were pursuing us.

What's that idiot's name?

What would happen if grandpa got caught?

I can't tell a brat like you all of that. Even if it's twisted, we're still a hidden part of the country. Though it's easy for me to say this, they won't even let children off. This isn't something you'd normally hear.

Anyway, our Russian Orthodox pursuers were really dangerous. They were true monsters gathered together to fight ghosts and fairies and other things beyond the realm of humanity. Old men who were just helping out couldn't hope to face them head on. It was overwhelming.

Therefore, us grandpas decided to leave the country. Luckily, they were the Russian Orthodox, and so in other words, it means that we only needed to run away from Russia. It's terrifying to wish for it, but no matter what, any human would do his utmost to grab onto this little ray of hope.

However, our surroundings were the -50 degrees Celsius of human Hell. It was a tough time. How should I say it, it was no longer a world that could be described through physical pain. Our feet were starting to sink, and we continued to walk on. There were people as old as grandpa and brats that were younger than you, everyone was the same. At that time, you were still in your mother's womb, and I believe your mum got her shapeshifting ability because of that.

Under this situation, the pursuers should act properly even though they're the Russian Orthodox, right?

But no, they're real professional soldiers that were specially trained to move along in the eternal arctic terrain. They were like robots that were made into puppets, moving around in a rhythmic manner, and not only were they top-notch soldiers, their weapons were top notch as well. They had horses made of metal, and those were 8-legged horses, you know. Oh yes, they had a spiritual item called the Sleipnir³.

The difference in speed between the grandpas and the Russian Orthodox Church was apparent by first glance.

³ Ancient Norse reference here. Called 'the slipper' in Norse mythology.

We could see the border in the snowstorm, but everyone knew that our pursuers would catch up to us before we could reach there. It was right in front of us, and we couldn't reach out and grab it, but after looking back to see our pursuers, we didn't have any other thought except to give up. Compared to working hard in a futile way, it's better to give up easily. But then again, we couldn't do it; the border that represented our hope was there, so how could we give up there?

Hm?

Then what happened next?

Of course we escaped. Otherwise, how could you be born? Grandpa couldn't possibly be here telling this story to you. You're saying that we did something?

Really? Really?

Seems like you don't understand how we escaped from the elites of the Russian Orthodox Church.

It's simple.

'That man' appeared in front of the grandpas.

That person was William Orville.

CHAPTER 2

The Men Who Stood Up From Defeat.

Flere210.

Part 1

Frantic footsteps echoed throughout the hospital in the night.

This was the emergency resuscitation hospital on the seventh level in District 22.

The patient transport bed's wheels let out *kacha-kacha* sounds, and numerous paramedics were surrounding the patient's bed as they move along, the loud sounds outside could be heard inside. The paramedics who had been busy pushing the patient's bed left the rest to the doctors and nurses. After that, the doctors and nurses all gathered in the centralized treatment room before disappearing behind the large doors of the operation room.

"...Finally managed to complete the operation. To be honest, I can't say whether he can still be considered safe,"

The young doctor said after seeing the patient's bed pushed out of the operation room and back into the centralized treatment room.

Now that the visiting hours were over, the corridor of the hospital was rather quiet.

But right now, there were many shadows walking in the dim corridor. A large crowd should be the correct term here, consisting of males and females, young and old: a group of around 50 people. Some were leaning their backs against the walls, some were sitting on the sofas, but all of them were listening to what the doctor was saying. Some of them had tattered clothes, and some of them were bandaged all over. Furthermore, red blood spots could be seen on a majority of those wearing white.

They were a group that call themselves the 'Amakusa', and as for what kind of organization they were, the doctor didn't know. To be honest, this was a truly suspicious group. If a large group of people like Skill-Out were to come into the hospital, there would definitely be a large number of delinquents in the waiting room. Thus, the young doctor didn't intend to pursue this further.

“Let me explain this for a while, so all ordinary folks should calm down. Now for the specifics: the patient’s entire body is covered in bruises from blunt trauma, and he has a slight concussion. He also showed signs of dislocation in his right shoulder and left foot. His insides are also a bit damaged from the impacts.”

“...In other words, you just can’t determine his condition now, right?”

The huge, black-beetle haired, man carefully chose his words before asking.

The doctor exhaled deeply.

“It should be considered a miracle... the worst case scenario would have been if oxygen were unable to flow into his brain well enough from being underwater for so long... that was really dangerous. Fortunately, there wasn’t too much harm from it,”

The young male doctor said as he looked through the digitalized injury report.

“However... even with multiple witnesses, the ‘reason’ that caused this is still unbelievable. The human body was blown away from the metal bridge several hundred meters, bouncing off the lake a few times and finally sunk into the water... though I can’t believe this, but to be caught up in such a serious situation, it’s amazing that he would dare to even take a walk outside.”

“We got let off the hook...”

Because of the dim lighting in the corridor, nobody knew who said that.

Even though the young male doctor turned back to see where the sound came from, he was unable to find out. They were a strange group, as there should be a huge sense of being overwhelmed, yet not even a single one of them was ‘standing out’. It was like they’re called ‘a scene of a crowd.’ Besides, they weren’t very striking, even if they were ‘a group of 50 people all bandaged up.’

“Anyway, it’s not over yet.”

The only one that ‘stood out’ was the beetle-haired man, asking as if he was confirming it.

“If we can say something to him, even if it’s just a short sentence, we just want to say sorry to him.”

“You, what are you saying!? Of course you must remain silent!? That, that, I don’t know why you’re apologizing, but now isn’t the time. He’s sleeping soundly due to the anesthetic, and even without the anesthetic, his body doesn’t look like it would allow him to wake up, so just let him rest.”

And the most important thing was, the young male doctor used his chin to indicate the centralized treatment area.

In order to be able to view the patient's situation from the outside, there was a huge glass panel hanging on the wall, and from the corridor, one could see several patients sleeping over there. In there on a bed surrounded by numerous machines, the hedgehog-headed boy was sleeping.

The beetle-headed man seemed as if he was being pulled by the young doctor as he stared at the centralized treatment room. At that moment, dark clouds appeared on his face.

As if hanging onto the bed, or kneeling on the floor, a girl waited there. A girl in a white nun's habit used her own hands to wrap the victim's hand tightly.

It was Index.

"...That kid, according to my experience, I feel it's best for her to be alone with him,"

The young doctor warned with an 'all hope is lost' look.

Even the beetle-headed man didn't have the guts to walk into the room with both of them inside. He could only nod his head silently. After confirming everything, the young doctor walked away.

The beetle-headed man—Tatemiya Saiji—took a step back from the centralized treatment room.

He was extremely regretful that that he couldn't do anything for the boy. All the Amakusa recovery and healing spells that had been passed down from generation to generation wouldn't work, and they could only pray for his safety. However, even the right to pray for him was perhaps a problem as well.

He said initially that he would protect that boy from Acqua well, but as how the wording went, he was completely 'kicked away.' After being shown mercy even after facing such a devastating attack, Tatemiya Saiji could only lie on the floor and watch Acqua head toward his target.

Besides, the guy that he wanted to protect actually fought to protect his Amakusa 'comrade'... how humiliating. He was now wrapped in bandages and had band-aids taped everywhere. An ordinary person might not have understood, but for someone who knew magic, a person could understand that the Amakusa had gotten even weaker in their techniques of blending into the surroundings.

Right now, the Amakusa could be said to have lost completely.

They lost to Acqua, and lost even further to Kamijou Touma.

"...Damn it."

Tatemiya unhappily clenched his teeth tightly.

No matter how low-pitched that was, the enemy wouldn't just wait around and do nothing. According to Itsuwa, Acqua of the Back would not attack Kamijou again if Kamijou Touma's right hand was cut off by tomorrow. Of course, whether it was the right hand or attacking, they couldn't let him do whatever he wanted.

Tatemiya understood what he should do.

In order to protect Kamijou Touma, no matter what, he had to stand up.

"How long are you going to kneel down there?"

Tatemiya asked. A place that had even less light than the dim corridor, and it could be said that all the darkness was gathered there. Over there, one could feel that there was a small animal trembling there in fear.

Maybe one wouldn't be able to understand it if the person didn't take a closer look.

But huddled at the edge of the sofa was Itsuwa.

Her hands and legs were bandaged, and the right side of her face was pasted with a rectangular gauze. Compared to the physical damage, the mental damage inflicted on her was likely several times heavier.

"...I, I..."

Her voice was full of unrest, and there was a bit of swallowing sound made. Maybe it was because she had been crying for a long time, she was unable to control her diaphragm well.

"...I, protect him... I said that I would. Whether spear, or magic... it was completely useless, not even... but, he said it, he thanked me... I couldn't protect him at all, couldn't even deal even the tiniest bit of damage on Acqua before he left... but I was thanked..."

A *pata pata* sound echoed throughout the corridor.

This may have been the sound of tears, or may have been the blood dripping out of her tightly clenched fist.

"The... the moment I heard that man say that, I wondered, if he had some really strong power. But I was wrong. That man, he can't rely on any defensive spell. Even when I tried to use a recovery spell, it didn't heal even a single wound, not even a scratch. He was just fighting by using his own flesh..."

"Itsuwa..."

"I, I just watched him be sent off to his death."

It may have seemed really weird to see a teary and smiling face.

“How can someone like that continue to live on leisurely? Why hasn’t divine judgment come down on one of us!? This is too strange. It should have been me on that hospital bed! That would have solved everything!!”

This one sentence was mixed with all sorts of feelings. This was a conversation, yet she was muttering to herself; it was of regret, yet also of anger; it was of a defeated dog whimpering, yet also a beast roaring.

She couldn’t even control her own emotions.

Being forced by the circumstances, Itsuwa did not have much left to gain control of her emotions.

Tatemiya was very clear about this. He narrowed his eyes, and forcefully took a step forward at Itsuwa as if he was trying to rip the darkness apart.

“So you don’t have any intention of standing up?”

“ ... ”

“So what the hell are you doing?”

Tatemiya said this calmly with a hand grabbing the front of Itsuwa’s shirt and pulled her out. Before anyone could say anything, Tatemiya used some really amazing arm strength to raise her entire body up and slammed her against the nearby wall.

BAM!! The intense sound echoed throughout the corridor.

The impact resounded throughout Itsuwa’s back, causing her breathing to become erratic. However, Itsuwa didn’t show any resistance at all, and just stared at Tatemiya with teary pupils as if she was begging for oxygen.

“...Mister, didn’t you...”

Though her voice was getting softer, Itsuwa continued to move her lips.

“Didn’t Tatemiya-san lose as well?”

“ ... ”

She probably realized that she shouldn’t have said these words. At this point in time, she shouldn’t have said the words that would anger Tatemiya. But she had clearly said the words that hurt Tatemiya’s soul, for she was already unable to endure it mentally any longer and was unwilling to do it any further. This girl called Itsuwa must have really

wanted to protect that boy, but the reality defied this deepest desire of hers. All her desire got crushed by overwhelming strength.

Tatemiya didn't force himself to understand Itsuwa's feelings.

It seemed that only Itsuwa alone was allowed to understand those feelings.

So in contrast, he said to the rest, "So that guy stepped up to save such a woman?"

Hearing these words, Itsuwa widened her eyes for a while.

As if she had been pierced by something, even when Itsuwa hadn't revealed a painful expression after being slammed into the wall, she revealed an indescribable painful look on her face after Tatemiya said this.

"The savior that you cared so much about was treated like that right in front of you, his body all battered badly. Being like that in front of him...you aren't planning to do anything? That guy really went all his way to risk his life for such a woman? If so, that guy's sacrifice was in vain, really in vain. The outcome is obvious. Didn't that idiot do something idiotic to save another idiot? Is that not how it is?"

Itsuwa's head felt hot. Her body being raised up in the air, Itsuwa let out a beast-like shout as she clenched her fist, ready to punch Tatemiya. However, before the fist could hit Tatemiya, Tatemiya brought Itsuwa down from the wall and slammed her to the floor.

This time, the huge sound would make anyone mistake it for an earth tremor.

Riding on Itsuwa's body while she was having difficulty to breathe, Tatemiya glared at her and said,

"Listen, if you don't understand, I'll teach you."

Deep, he just said it in a deep voice.

Whether it was Tatemiya's voice or his expression, anyone could see the rage in his heart.

"—Acqua of the Back will definitely come back."

Itsuwa's body instantly jerked.

Trying to think about what he shouldn't be thinking, Tatemiya again confirmed,

"Even if we stay here and be upset, time will continue to shorten. Every second we waste, the chances of happiness will go down a notch! Can you allow this to happen? There's still a possibility, no matter how small it is, it still exists, but ARE YOU GOING TO LET THAT USELESS GUILT AND REGRET COST YOU THAT CHANCE!? ARE YOU GOING TO LET THAT GUY GET HIS ARM CUT OFF WHEN HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW ANYTHING

WHILE BEING ABANDONED!? IF YOU WANT TO PROTECT HIS SMILE, STAND UP, STOP THINKING ABOUT YOURSELF AND CAUSING THE DEVASTATION OF OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES!!”

Tatemiya's shout was almost becoming a roar.

Facing Itsuwa, who still didn't say anything, Tatemiya continued, “...If our help would come over now, we would have done that already. If Priestess-sama said that she will come over, we can leave that Saint to her. But things won't turn out ideally as we would hope. Listen—Acqua of the Back will definitely come back. DO YOU WANT TO TURN THIS HOSPITAL INTO A BATTLEFIELD? JUST TO ESCAPE FROM THIS USELESS REALITY!!?”

“Ta,te...miya-san.”

“EVEN IF WE DON'T DO ANYTHING, ACQUA WILL STILL COME BACK!! EVEN IF WE'RE TO REQUEST REINFORCEMENTS, THE ANGLICAN CHURCH CAN'T JUST CHANGE THEIR STRATEGY AND SEND REINFORCEMENTS, SUCH A GOOD THING ISN'T GOING TO HAPPEN!! THUS, WE, AS PEOPLE STILL MOVING, ARE THE ONLY ONES ABLE TO TAKE ACTION. WE ARE THE ONLY ONES ABLE TO FIGHT ON!! FORGET ABOUT IT BEING A MASSACRE, IF WE DON'T DO ANYTHING, WHO'S GOING TO PROTECT HIM WHILE HE'S STILL NUMB AND ASLEEP!? DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND ALL THIS!?”

Tatemiya's hand, which was grabbing onto Itsuwa's chest, let out a slight sound as the grip was too tight.

Actually, the force he exerted on his hand was almost enough to destroy his hand. Also, Itsuwa knew that it wasn't just one person being angry and embarrassed about being unable to protect Kamijou Touma, but the reality was that everyone here had been beaten easily.

Even so, they said that they were going to stand up again.

Even after they knew the feeling of a defeated hound, they wouldn't continue to be depressed like this, but would stand up again.

In order to protect something important.

If so,

“(I...want...)”

“You want to apologize to that guy?”

Tatemiya said as he stared at Itsuwa's eyes.

“So do you want to let the ‘guy you want to protect the most’, the one who had gotten beat up like that, to stand in the sunlight again?”

Itsuwa nodded her head slightly.

Though she seemed to be saying something, it was hard to make out what she was saying since she was crying.

“...Then show me a fight. Prove to me that you’re the best girl, let him feel that risking his life for this girl is worth it. You may want to apologize or even see his smiling face again, but if he’s dead, isn’t it all worthless? If you don’t want to regret before his tomb, you have to fight alongside us!”

Tatemiya let go with the hand that was grabbing onto Itsuwa and slowly got up.

Looking around, he seemed to be confirming something as he said, “...Among all of you, is there anyone who’s going to say that he or she disagrees with Itsuwa?”

Tatemiya’s voice echoed throughout as if he was trying to break the regretful and weak atmosphere.

“If there’s anyone, I’ll make that person wake up.”

Nobody responded.

But everyone had made their realization.

It was not like all their regret and fatigue was gone, but rather, their thirst for battle had overcome all other things.

Tatemiya again looked at the people that amounted to about 50, all standing in the dim corridor of the hospital, and said, “If there’s no one, good. Next, we just have to fight on.”

None of the Amakusa-style Church members looked back.

Leaving only the boy and a nun inside the centralized treatment room, the Amakusa would go back to where they belonged—the battlefield—in order to fight against this strong enemy.

“Really, the guy we wanted to save was right in front of us, yet none of us managed to reach out and save him. How could we have let this happen to him?”

There was only one thing they had to do.

Give the decisive counterblow to the enemy and protect that boy’s life, that was all there was.

Part 2

In the darkness of the night, Acqua of the Back was alone, silently standing down there.

It was a natural park located far inside a corner of the third level of District 22. The reason he was there was simple, even if it was a bit, he wanted to get far away from the android development plant where science and technology was rampant. However, he should have noticed that all the forests here were products of scientific water and cultivation technology. It was too late though.

(Speaking of which, this entire underground space was made for humans, huh?)

Looking up, he could see the starry sky, but these were just images made from a planetarium and a screen. Anyone that understood magic by even the slightest bit would sense how it deviated from how it really worked.

It seemed like there was not much money spent on maintenance, as the street lights scattered throughout the streets, letting out small rectangular lights.

Acqua was holding onto an ordinary phone.

He was talking to the Pope, however, his cell phone was not turned on. The glow on the tip of the antenna was created due to magic.

(There's still the likelihood of us being eavesdropped. Besides, those elite Anglican Church forces, the Amakusa, are still here.)

Even if he said this, it was better than to use the phone so openly right in the middle of Academy City, the main stronghold of the science side.

“Speaking of which, it's not about killing the target, but getting his right hand? I heard it from Vento before that God's Right Seat won't change their goal.”

““That's a personal problem of Vento's character. In fact, we would change according to how the situation plans out...but Terra went overboard.”“

Though Acqua had killed a comrade in cold blood and sent his corpse to an enemy organization, he didn't feel the slightest sense of regret or guilt.

“Basically, what's special about that boy is gathered on that 'right hand' of his, all the threats will be removed if we take it away. We're fussing all over an adolescent boy. Really, we aren't such a carefree organization.”

““To me, what you're doing now is the better method.”“

One could feel that the Pope was smiling on the other side of the phone.

““I did mention it to Vento before, but...if he really intends on defying God, we have to kill him. However, I did hear that the boy isn't all familiar with God, so I'm really against having to kill him all because of this...but Vento ignored my view.”“

“...I don't know what you're expecting from me, but I'm neither a good man nor a philanthropist.”

Acqua's tone was somewhat flat.

“If it comes to the point where I have to kill him, I'll still do it. Right now, that time hasn't come yet, and once that time comes, I'll kill him, that's all. Among all these choices and timing, there may be a possibility that I'll never need to kill him, ever, that's how the situation is.”

There was no sense of false pretense in his tone.

In this highest group of authority in this world that had only 4 members, the one who had instantly killed his comrade, Terra of the Left, without any mercy was Acqua of the Back alone.

If the hostile threat disappeared with the 'right hand', all these would come to an end.

If that didn't work, or if he refused to give up his 'right hand'—what came next was very simple.

Kill him.

There was no need for anything else to be said; Acqua would return everything to dust.

He had such strength and resolve.

Acqua of the Back recognized this clearly, and his expression did not change at all.

““This is truly an intriguing situation.”“

The Pope suddenly said.

““God's Right Seat was set up as a 'negotiation tool' for the Pope to enter the enemy's stronghold, yet this Pope here can only watch from the Vatican.”“

In Christianity, there was only one God.

All miracles were managed by this one and only God, so no one would defy this entity called God. Normally, everyone should be living happily together, and there shouldn't be anyone living in misery.

However, the reality was a lot different.

It was obvious when one looked through the history of humanity: the failure of the Crusades, the plague running rampant, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. This wasn't just an issue about individual happiness anymore; these events had nearly caused the entire continent of Europe to be annihilated.

The Pope was not enough to handle all these.

Actually, for Christianity that signified that 'God is absolute', for the Pope, who represented all these, to find someone to talk about this, it was a sign of misfortune.

Thus, God's Right Seat had been born.

Sometimes, they had power and knowledge that even the Pope had to rely on, they could be considered to be a special existence among this pyramid of the Christian society.

They were different from the Cardinals, the administrators, the strategists etc. Basically, they who 'didn't exist in the pyramid in the first place' would just give advice from behind the scenes.

The number of members was always designated as 4, representing the 4 archangels that were the most important amongst angels. Just like this, the members of God's Right Seat could be changed and replaced 'internally' to keep it alive.

But even with these unique circumstances, sometimes the Pope would rely on these 'secret discussions' too often, causing God's Right Seat to take the central role of the Roman Catholic Church.

Regarding this, Acqua pondered for a while.

However, he didn't say anything specific.

"The next time I contact you will be when all this is over. As for whether the target will still be alive after that, I'll tell you later."

At this moment, a loud sound covered Acqua's voice.

The reason was due to the air.

Something flashed once in the darkness, it was a small, dim light that an ordinary human was unable to distinguish. Acqua sensed the danger behind it, tucked the cell phone in with his shoulder, and easily jumped over.

The air formed a huge tornado, and the place where Acqua had been standing was ripped up easily.

Seeing this strange phenomenon, Acqua finally made a hypothesis.

(...Scattering some strange particles into the air and then decomposing the contents, huh?)

For people who were familiar with science, they would think of this nano-sized reflective metal codenamed 'mimosa'. There was no need for any circuits or power, a specific frequency was used to react to some very small particles. The theory behind this was like a wireless remote control, it could distinguish between animal and plant cells one by one.

Acqua was wary against some magical hand that he couldn't distinguish. This time, the giant artificial planetarium screen changed abnormally, letting out a bee like noise and indicating a warning on the screen.

““Third level region-wide alert regarding absence of air. All residents are to evacuate to the designated buildings. All families are to install the designated oxygen flasks. I repeat, third level region-wide alert regarding absence of air.”“

“I see.”

Acqua gave a defiant smile.

“It seems like the opponent has scattered many offensive microbits to force me to be unable to escape.”

““This is really bad.”“

“You think so?”

Acqua sounded as if he was reciting something. All the moisture in the air was his friend. With the moisture, he roughly had enough time to understand the movements of the 'mimosa' and predict it.

The bushes that were off to the side let out some crisp, ripping sounds. Looking inside, one could see that there were powered suits moving between the trees, their armor reflecting moonlight. Slightly far away, one could hear a mechanical sound. Run on gasoline and electricity, some urban armored vehicles seemed to have been deployed.

Even Acqua's smile vanished.

“So they're here to check my battle strength? Then let's show them how a mercenary fights.”

““Please try not to kill anyone.”“

“I'm not sure, but it seems like they're unmanned. I can't sense anything that's human-like from them, so they managed to get all the way here.”

At this moment, a new explosion could be heard.

Acqua pulled out a 5 meter metal mace from his shadow.

“However, these things from Academy City are really good.”

He easily rested the heavy metal on his shoulder and said,

“It’s nice for them to create a battlefield without any bloodshed, I’m really grateful for that. Nice way to pass the time.”

As if in response to his voice, the enemy started to take action.

In a corner of the park, the numerous shadows around Acqua surrounded him.

Numerous bullets were fired at him.

The ‘mimosa’ that could not be identified with the naked eye came attacking as well.

But these weren’t going to beat Acqua.

He avoided the bullets and blew the ‘mimosa’ away. Even the bullets that used the power of the ‘mimosa’ and deviated from normal trajectory were predicted by Acqua easily and countered.

“(I’m not sure of how the science side works, but there has got to be someone coordinating them from somewhere.)”

Acqua broke through the barricade. The 5 meter-long lance-like metal mace he was holding onto pierced into the side of the armored vehicles. Then ignoring the weight of the armored vehicle, Acqua swung the metal mace, causing even more of these armored vehicles to be crushed and blown up. This caused the movements of the ‘mimosa’ to be restricted. Maybe some special spell was used as among the burning flames, Acqua walked through as if he was taking a stroll.

“(Then, I’ll just have to rip through the powered suits, check the insides and confirm them all one by one!!)”

God’s Right Seat’s Acqua of the Back started to take action.

Sounds of explosion and destruction echoed throughout the place.

Part 3

There was a 9-hour time difference between Japan and England.

Right now, it should be midnight in Japan, but it was evening in England. Due to the latitude, the sun set in England even earlier, so the sky there was slightly violet.

The Royal Academy of Arts.

A famous and top-notch arts museum in England. This place was one that developed the next generation group of artists, and held activities similar to those of an arts school. And right now, one could hear the voice of a lecturer teaching.

Standing on the brightly-lit stage was Sherry Cromwell.

“Then, we’ll be discussing about heraldries today.”

She had godiva blond hair that was like a lion and chocolate-colored skin. Her attire was a black Gothic Lolita dress that was scratched and tattered all over. As a renowned sculptor, she was known for only appreciating her own works...or that was what the students said about her.

“The heraldries are like those family crests, they’re not those so-called things that don’t exist in real life...well, it’s not like those heraldries don’t exist, but we’ll just ignore them for now.”

Laughter could be heard from the crowd of students.

Seemed like they had just treated it as some sort of a joke, but the magician Sherry didn’t mind as she continued,

“If we’re going to talk about heraldries, normally speaking, they are made of many different parts. However, today, I’m going to talk about those shield-type heraldries.”

Sherry said in a bored manner.

“You people who only know how to paint on a canvas might find these to be unimportant, but this knowledge may help you when you are creating something that has a special significance in it. Of course, I understand that you’re depressed, so just listening a bit will do.”

At this moment, a few knocking sounds could be heard at the door.

Sherry, who was placing the shield-type heraldry on the podium, looked surprised as she stared at the door.

Without even making the slightest bit of noise, the one who opened the door the slightest bit was the young clerk of this arts museum. She was a young clerk that had just started work there last year, and she lowered her little head and said in a slightly apologetic manner.

“Well...someone from the British Library is looking for you...”

“Really?”

Sherry made an appropriate reply. She then stroked the side of the heraldry with her index finger and pondered,

“Then, if you excuse me. Everyone please carry on with your self-studies.”

Sherry used a perfunctory tone to instruct the students, then scratched her head as she walked out of the classroom.

After arriving in the corridor, the petite clerk looked at Sherry embarrassed.

“I’m really sorry about that.”

“No problem, that group of people likes to do self-study. Creating something can’t be done by just teaching, and those people that love to self-study have no such talent in the first place.”

“Ha, haha...”

The clerk laughed ambiguously.

With an impatient tone, Sherry asked, “So how did this person contact me?”

“Mm, through the phone. Please receive it at the office.”

With the clerk leading, Sherry arrived in a small room. The telephone on the business desk was giving off a flickering light through the little light bulb on it.

“Is that it?”

“Since it came from the British library...it should be something related to art.”

“I see.”

Sherry often got ‘contacts’ from places like the British Museum and the St. George Cathedral, and the people around her seemed to feel that they were looking for her to do some artistic identification and restoration.

The clerk nodded to Sherry before returning to her place. After watching her leave, Sherry picked up the phone receiver with an impatient look.

The voice that came from the other side belonged to a lazy-sounding woman.

““Ara ara. Is that Miss Sherry?”“

“...So it’s you, Orsola. Really, can’t you find any other experts?”

In contrast to a really irritated Sherry, the woman called Orsola smiled without any nerves.

““Well, the large garbage disposal occurs on Mondays and Fridays.”“

“I got it, I got it. It’s useless to talk to you regarding this, so hurry up and get straight to the point.”

Recently, Sherry had mastered a way to handle Orsola, so she continued to talk normally.

Orsola said the following, ““From the remaining records of the English Library regarding past magic events, regarding God’s Right Seat... we did check up on Acqua of the Back, but...”“

“I heard of those things before I got out to work. So, what’re the results?”

““The testimonies from the September 30th incident indicate that before he used the name ‘Acqua’, he seemed to have worked primarily in England, as there were many similar eyewitness reports.”“

“I heard you say that during lunch break.”

““And some of them testified that ‘he’ was a Knight of England...”“

“Ah?”

Sherry’s eyebrows immediately twitched due to surprise.

(As a Roman Catholic, this Acqua of the Back was actually a Knight of England...?)

In modern England, the title of ‘knight’ was just a medal of commendation on the surface. Their background was unimportant; anybody that made any outstanding contributions to England could receive this title from the Queen. However, this title can’t be inherited by children or any descendants. To put it in a straightforward manner, it was similar to an outstanding civil award.

However, there was a difference. In the dark side of England, there was still a large group known as the Knights of England. They would raise their sharp blades high for the Royal Family and the country, and anyone that threatened these would be seen as enemies. They would risk their lives to annihilate and—like the samurais of the East—these Knights probably vanished into the river of history with the advent of firearms.

“...And right now, this person acting on behalf of another sect was actually a foreign Knight of England. If that’s true, this may get troublesome. Academy City may come over to question the Anglican Church’s role in this because of Acqua of the Back’s involvement.”

““But from the records of Knights in Buckingham Palace, there isn’t anyone with Acqua’s characteristics.”“

“Maybe that information was false.”

Most likely, he was a mercenary who had been skilled in magic and gotten mistaken...this should be the case.

But Orsola let out a frustrated “Ummm...” sound.

““It’s true that there was no such person in the name list, but...”“

“Ah?”

““For someone who is nominated to be knighted, there should be some shield heraldry that symbolizes their family background, right? I checked with the heraldries manufacturers in the outskirts of London, and it seems like there was an unknown order for a shield heraldry for an unknown person...and this heraldry seemed to have been cancelled after it was made halfway.”“

“...I see.”

Sherry’s mouth curled up.

“The patterns of the heraldry should have the person’s background, family history and identity carved on it as markings. If we check these, we can investigate the real identity of this Knight who doesn’t exist in the records.”

““So only the pictures of the patterns, right?... I suppose. Well, I’ll use that thing called ‘FAX’ to send it over to you like how I ordered that stuff the last time.”“

Sherry turned to look at the fax machine, and just at that moment, a sheet of paper was being coughed out from the machine. The young female clerk that had called her immediately moved towards the fax machine.

Sherry received a pile of 10+ pieces of paper from the female clerk and scattered them onto the table, using her index finger to run through the patterns and see what the patterns depicted. Instead of saying that it was a piece of art, this thing in front of her seemed more like a blueprint for a machine. The black and white paper had all sorts of information like materials and colors written all over it. Maybe this made the paper feel a lot more like a blueprint.

“...There are two main colors, blue as base and green as decoration. The animals used are...a dragon and a unicorn, and the woman here is Selkie (a female ghost rumored to be based in England)...right? The shield’s divided into 4 parts, and there are 3 animals on it, this means...”

““Is there anything you got there?”“

“I just understood some basic things.”

After looking at the picture for a while, Sherry sighed as if she had given up.

“I don’t know the specifics, but it seems like the owner of this heraldry really loves to make fun of others.”

“Ha?”

“The dragon, the unicorn and Selkie. The common point between these three is that ‘they don’t exist in real life’. Also, the colors used for the heraldry are odd. The base color is blue, and then for decoration, green was used when it’s supposed to be another base color. This defies common logic...it’s so explicit that anyone has no choice but to laugh at it. It seems like this person was unhappy about being chosen as a Knight.”

Sherry’s fingers were like a phonograph, as she stroked the pictures and transfer the records on the pieces of paper to adult language.

“Most likely, he was warmly invited by the Royal Family, but wanted to reject this and didn’t manage to succeed, so he accepted this grudgingly. If so....this person should have been an active fighter as a free man before he became a Knight. And these were all beneficial to England...he’s a mercenary and yet he was appointed as a Knight, this shows that he’s a just person even on the dirty and bloody battlefield. An enemy without fault even in background, there’s no one harder to handle than this kind of person.”

For confirmation, Sherry checked the date it was ordered from Orsola. It seemed like it was about 10 years ago.

It was such an old thing that had been cancelled and yet was so well preserved by the manufacturer, this showed that Acqua was so well respected when he had been working in England.

““Also, for those who contributed through magic, anyone that’s to be given the title of a Knight under this category has to be an Englishman, so how about if I check on mercenary activities in England?”“

“So be it.”

Sherry used her index finger to knock on the animal drawings.

“A dragon, unicorn, and Selkie. These all appear in English legends, but it doesn’t mean England, but rather ‘Great Britain’ that includes the 4 areas of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.”

““...? Isn’t the unicorn supposed to originate from Greek mythology?”“

“There was the legend of Elizabeth the First receiving the horn of a unicorn.”

Actually, it was just an ordinary animal bone, Sherry muttered.

“Anyway, he’s born in England, and was a mercenary that contributed greatly to Britain...that group of lone wolf mercenaries that aren’t affiliated to any magic guilds and seem ‘primed to be nominated as Knights’ are suspicious here. And even when he was requested to do something, he couldn’t refuse it completely, so this shows that he had some connections with the Royal Family. Check out every single bit of information on this person.”

Part 4

With Tatemiya Saiji leading the 50-strong Amakusa main force, they were now in an alley of District 22. After that, Tatemiya, who was listening to a cell phone he was holding, said to his fellow comrades.

“Acqua of the Back seems to be fighting with Academy City’s unmanned powered suits in the natural park on the third level.”

At this moment, everyone present felt nervous.

The third level was where Kamijou and Itsuwa had been attacked.

There was no need to mention who had the victory. This monster called Acqua of the Back wouldn’t be beaten with just a large group of machines, everyone knew that.

Ushibuka, who was near Tatemiya, looked at Tatemiya and asked, “...Should we go?”

“No.”

Tatemiya closed the phone and shook his head as he answered.

“Even if we’re to go now, the result is very obvious. Right now, we can only wait for the intel from the Anglican Church, be ready, come up with the best battle plan and deliver our best fight at the right time...after this, it’ll be the decisive battle. We have to fight with all we got.”

Acqua of the Back had managed to beat up the Amakusa comrades and even their savior, Kamijou, to this extent. But even if they knew where he was now, they could only endure. Tatemiya’s heart was probably burning and raging now, but he chose to endure for this one shot at victory as he said “Just wait”.

“This isn’t the right time. For us to prepare our best battle plan, we can only rely on Miss Orsola and the rest as they compile all the information, it’s alright even if they’re a bit late. So what we can do now is simple—our best preparations.”

Tatemiya looked at his surroundings.

The Amakusa members scattered all over were all armed with weapons like swords and spears. Normally, they would sacrifice the sharpness of their weapons for ease of carrying the weapons secretly. However, now wasn’t the time to worry about this, so they were ‘strengthening’ their weapons.

“...Please wait for another 3 hours.”

At this moment, this voice could be heard.

Tatemiya turned to look at the source of this voice, and over there was Itsuwa modifying her belt like a belay. She was sitting on the floor as she strengthened her spear—or more accurately, a full-on modification.

Her spear was attached through many short rods, so no matter how strong it was, the strength would always be weaker. She had used some fixative spray to spray the entire spear and then coat a layer of resin on it, and right now, she was using sandpaper to polish the surface of the grip.

“I have to adjust the shape until it feels straight, and I also need quite a bit of time to sharpen the blade such that it’s able to stab through a monster...but leave it to me. Since I got attacked directly by that guy, I know what kind of guy he is...”

Continuing to use the sandpaper to rub and adjust the exterior of the spear. After the small pile of resin was flattened, she applied another layer of fixative spray on it, repeating it tens of times, hundreds of times.

One could sense the killer intent in her heart as the sound of resin being scrubbed by sandpaper could be heard. This caused Tatemiya’s back to go cold a bit; it was just like an old cannibal granny sharpening her knife in the middle of the night. Once this idea popped up in his mind, Tatemiya thought: not, not good! Did I overdo it a bit?

It seemed like Ushibuka was wondering that as well, as he slowly got near Tatemiya and whispered to his ear.

“(...What to do now! It feels like we added too much oil to Itsuwa!⁴ It’s almost on a petrochemical plant-level fire!)”

⁴ Asian expression for “to motivate/encourage”

“(...Ah, no way!? But you see, she looked so out of it at the hospital, so I just did that! All I wanted to do was to motivate her!?)”

“(...YOU IDIOT!! You didn’t consider the outcome of it and torched her up!? Don’t you know how we will be scared of a maiden in love in the future!!?)”

“(...EH EH? MY RESPONSIBILITY!? THEN WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO!?)”

“Tatemiya-san, and Ushibuka-san.”

Suddenly being called by Itsuwa, the two men were rooted to the spot in fear.

“I’m alright, I’m alright—so, can you allow me to focus, please?”

A blank expression compounded with a very flat tone.

After Itsuwa said this, she continued to use the sandpaper to polish her spear to let it feel more comfortable in her hands, convenient to use, sharp and deadly. The shape of the spear was slowly forming.

“(WWAAAHHHHHH!!!)” Seeing Tatemiya and Ushibuka tremble, their comrades all sighed in helplessness.

Itsuwa looked extremely violent today, so Tatemiya and company could only cast strengthening spells on their clothes and make sure that everyone had jotted down the terrain in a notebook and memorized it.

As they were doing this, Tatemiya and Ushibuka felt like praying for Acqua of the Back’s safety, even though he was not there.

[We know you have your reasons, but our Itsuwa here has switched to killing mode, so please protect yourself well.]

“(...We cannot, cannot face an angry Itsuwa head on.)”

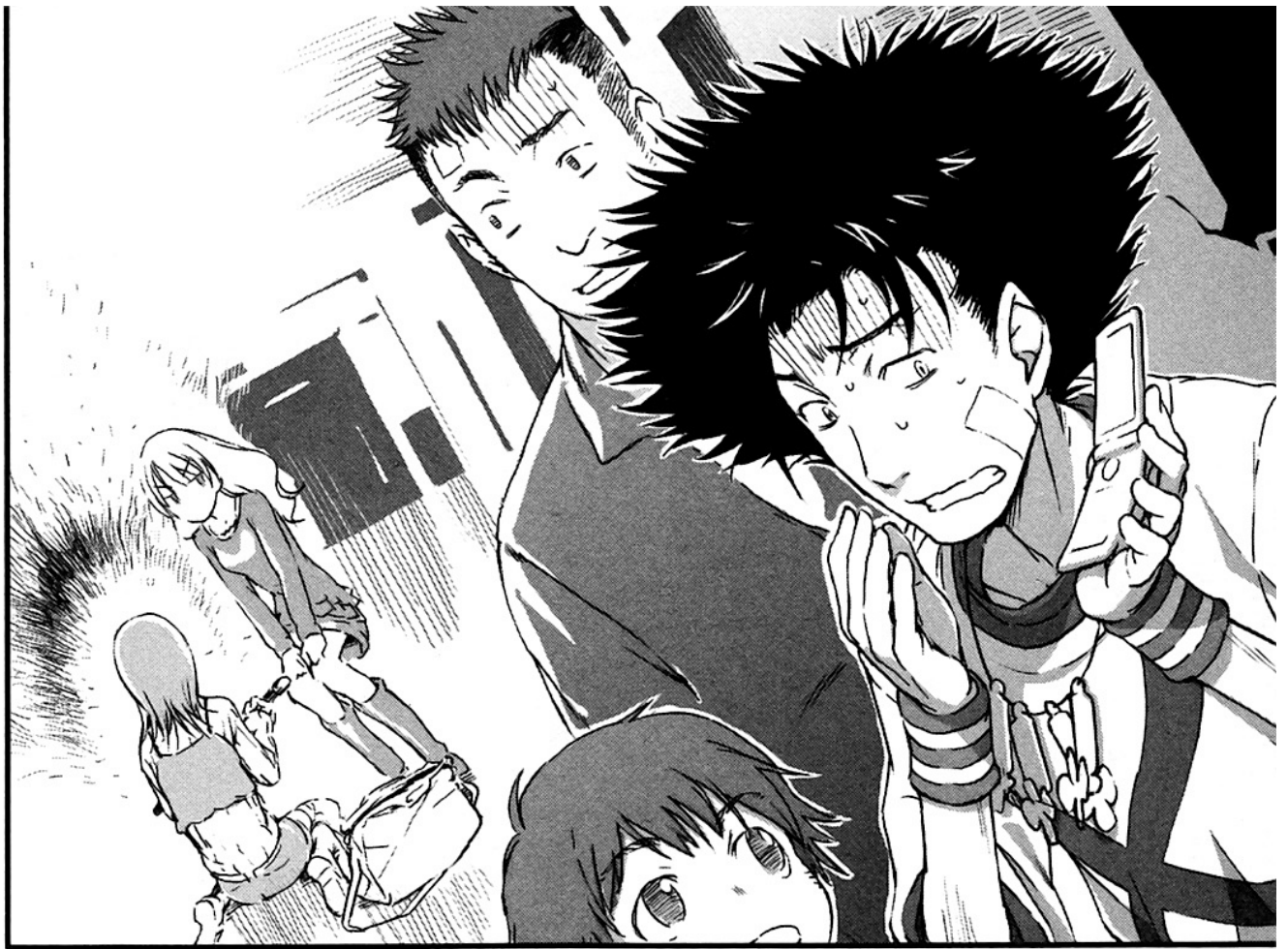
“(...Ye, yeah, I feel the same.)”

At this moment, Tatemiya Saiji’s phone rang.

““Ara ara, is that Tatemiya-san?””

“Wah, Miss Orsola!! Your voice’s really healing me!!”

Seemed like Tatemiya had been hit really bad somewhere deep inside his heart, as it seemed like he was about to cry.



But it seemed like the person on the other side of the phone didn't grasp the situation.

““Well, I'm sorry. Seems like I called the wrong person. Then I'll—”“

“PLEASE DON'T HANG UP THE PHONE!! IF YOU HANG UP NOW THIS PLACE IS GOING TO BE TENSE AGAIN!!”

Having finally grasped the grain of hope, Tatemiya paid attention to Orsola. In order to allow everyone to hear the conversation, he put the call on speaker phone and waited for Orsola to continue on.

““I'm going to tell you the latest information regarding Acqua right now.”“

This natural airhead and self-centered Orsola was now reporting in a rare serious tone.

““We found out Acqua of the Back's real name. His name is William Orville, a magic mercenary born in England, and he doesn't have any affiliation. Of course, when he was born, he wasn't a Roman Catholic, and there are records indicating that he was baptized in an Anglican church when he was young. As a mercenary, he was a lone wolf, and it seems like he specializes in taking down enemy strongholds.”“

To think that he actually specialized in this.

This didn't just mean that he specialized in 'taking down enemy bases', but rather, among all forms of combat, he specialized in taking down bases. But besides that, it didn't mean that he didn't excel in other forms of combat. If so, William Orville would have failed a long time ago, and couldn't possibly be standing here.

““Also, as a magician, William had a magic name. The name engraved on his chest is Flere²¹⁰.”

“...Flere...right?”

A Latin word normally formed half of the magic name, and the meaning of the word Flere was 'tears'. They may not have known the significance to this name, but William Orville most probably had a reason for engraving it on his chest. Also, to be able to engrave the name on his chest, it showed that he had overwhelming strength.

A Saint.

This one word that signified the absolute difference against him echoed in Tatemiya's mind.

“So what were William Orville's accomplishments as a mercenary?”

““Hm, there was an ‘aid to an Astrology group’ in Western Russia, an ‘elimination of the Orleans’ Knights’ in Central France, an ‘England’s third princess Rescue Mission’ near the Straits of Dover...I can’t finish if I’m to name them all.”“

This showed that he had participated in a lot of battles, and kept winning. To be able to come back alive from so many battles, this was the best proof of Acqua of the Back’s strength.

Orsola rattled off the list of battles that Acqua had taken part in, and Tatemiya had heard of some of them. No matter which ones they were, everyone knew how intense those battles were. Even if the entire Amakusa was to gather, they might never be competent enough to handle this. Basically, those were Hell-like battlefields.

“One strong enemy...no, he’s our worst enemy.”

““But William Orville isn’t just someone who will settle any problem with just force. For instance, even in the medical facilities within the battle zones, he will impart knowledge of herbs to them to lower the mortality rate, taught poor and hungry villages how to cook Murdock...he’s pretty active even outside the battlefield. In some places, they even call him a ‘Sage’.”

These were really things that people could only do when they truly realized the reality on the battlefield.

Some problems couldn’t just be settled by sending large number of forces or donating. One had to truly experience the atmosphere of a battlefield to understand what the people really needed, and thus they could understand that ‘what they could do’ wasn’t just in the short-term, but rather ways to improve their standard of living in the long run. It seemed like Acqua of the Back wasn’t just a battle maniac.

He had a robust body and a softer mentally, he was a wise beast.

This was Tatemiya’s impression of him right now.

““We didn’t find anything that can be classified as a weakness. As a mercenary, he continued to use this attribute of being a Saint to continue to carry out explosive battles.”“

“...So after he changed sects, he obtained the strength of a member of God’s Right Seat?”

Yes, all the legends during the mercenary era had happened before William Orville was called ‘Acqua of the Back’. Right now, his power should be a lot stronger than that, and not just that, he had completely mastered a new form of fighting. Tatemiya again recognized how strong this opponent was, and he was likely even scarier than their Priestess-sama.

(With this power, how did he control his powers?)

On first glance, people like Kanzaki seemed like they managed to control their powers naturally, but that wasn't the case. If an ordinary magician like Tatemiya was to try control that power, they would be completely destroyed by the power.

And the power that Acqua wielded was even stronger than that.

(...So we can't overcome him with magic, huh?)

““Originally, William was supposed to be a Knight of England, but he disappeared a week before he was appointed, so the heraldry that was halfway done was kept in the maker's house.”“

And when he appeared again, he had become an enemy of England.

What happened during that time was still a mystery, but they didn't have time to wonder about this.

“We can't expect any weaknesses from him. But at least we can find out Acqua's main fighting methods, right? Like the kinds of weapons he uses, what school of thought he came from.”

““As for school of thought, it seems like he self-taught himself, and he calls it the 'Mercenary code'. As for weapons, he uses a 5 meter long iron mace that looks like a knight's lance.”“

These were things that Tatemiya already knew having fought against Acqua of the Back first-hand before.

““Also...the way he moves in battle is rather unique, not by running, but it seems like he glides on the floor.”“

“...?”

At this moment, Tatemiya couldn't think anymore. It was true that he hadn't heard anything when he had been approached, and now that Orsola mentioned it, that seemed to be the case. No matter what, the speed at which Acqua of the Back moved, except for the moment he changed directions, made it look like he was vanishing.

““Seems like he uses a water movement spell. The reason why horse carriages can slide on ice is because of a thin layer of water between the carriage wheels and the ice, right? ““

“That means...this guy, before he was called 'Acqua of the Back', he knew how to use water spells...”

Vento of the Front, Terra of the Left, Acqua of the Back.

If they each represented the four archangels, then Acqua represented the Power of God, his element was water, and during the last battle, he hadn't used any water spells because with the abilities of the fighters there, there had been no need to use them.

"(...So what sort of plan should we use?)"

The intangibles—the number of intangibles that far exceeded their imagination was too many, and Tatemiya couldn't help but laugh at this.

At this moment.

"No matter who the enemy is, what we have to do hasn't changed..."

Plainly.

Without moving her lips, Itsuwa said this as she wielded her enhanced spear.

"You're right, Tatemiya-san..."

The unspoken meaning behind Itsuwa's words was 'Don't run away'. Hearing these words, Tatemiya's hand that was holding onto the cell phone, trembled violently.

Part 5

It was currently 3 AM.

On a metal bridge on the third level of District 22, Acqua of the Back was standing there casually.

From the park till all the way here, he had taken down a total of 8 self-propelled 'mimosas', 17 armored vehicles, 38 androids, all unmanned. Every time he took down an enemy, he would move on to another point before destroying the enemy...though he had been repeating this over and over again, he hadn't managed to find something like a human controller.

It seemed like the opponent wasn't as tactless and dumb as he had expected.

Acqua didn't even look at the artificial planetarium giant screen as he pondered to himself.

(It would be very easy now if I had Vento's 'Divine Punishment'...)

Even so, the enemy forces had retreated after an hour of fighting.

Maybe because it was so one-sided that the higher ups of Academy City felt that they were just wasting their military resources. Acqua himself also felt this way, wondering how much money had been spent to build what was now a pile of scrap metal. The huge amount of money needed to buy modern weapons would sometimes change a person's thoughts regarding money. *Don't they have a better use for this money?* Acqua thought.

“...Unexpectedly though, they aren't idiots.”

Acqua made this assessment regarding this enemy that had retreated at an appropriate time.

Any professional would often have a sense of pride regarding their areas of specialties; these were things that could be explained in every industry. And for soldiers, it was the most direct thing, 'force'. There shouldn't be anyone able to endure and repress the feeling of being abused and killed. But there were leaders who could repress that anger, propose a logical reasoning that everyone could accept, analyze the situation well and quickly give orders to retreat, this kind of person existed in Academy City.

But no matter how good the political skills the enemy commander had, no matter how strong the forces he had, the thing that Acqua wanted to do hadn't changed.

Destroy the Imagine Breaker.

And to eradicate anything that was impeding him from taking action.

(Then.)

Acqua pulled out a pocket watch from his pocket and confirmed the time.

(So there are 19 hours till the Imagine Breaker deal, huh...?)

He covered the pocket watch and slipped it into his pants pocket. Acqua slightly moved his eyeballs at the side.

“So I can see the 'outcome' now, right?”

Acqua said to the darkness.

“There's still more than half a day till that time. Are you guys prepared for this?”

Footsteps could be heard from deep within the darkness.

It wasn't just a pair.

The number of footsteps totaled around 50, and every one of them was of the Anglican Church sect, the Amakusa style Remix of Church. The footsteps gave a sense of unity, as if they just penetrated each gap between the metal frames.

Males and females, young and old, they were all wearing ordinary attire, but they were wielding weapons like swords, spears, axes, bows, whips; and under the shine off the street lights, it was rather unlucky. There were people wielding weapons that even the ex-mercenary Acqua didn't know of, like the Japanese exclusive chain sickle (kusarigama), the jutte and even something like a metal flute.

Standing in front was the current substitute Supreme Pontiff of the Amakusa style Church, Tatemiya Saiji.

The reason why Acqua knew his name was simple. During the previous battle, Acqua had managed to sort out information that the Amakusa exchanged with each other. Being able to effectively gather information in the middle of a battlefield was something a mercenary had to be skilled in.

“Well, you gave us a tough question that we couldn't decide on, and ended up not bothered by it at all, so we quickly settled it. Got to thank you for that.”

Tatemiya was holding a large wavy sword. Like a broadsword and two-handed sword, this was a huge two handed sword that was meant to cleave through the enemy's defenses.

It was a huge monster that was over 1.8m in length.

But to Acqua, that was like a kid holding a wooden stick.

“An unreasonably tough question, huh?”

As if he was mocking, Acqua used the inside of his feet to knock the ground a few times.

Without a single sound, a large block of metal that was over 5m long leapt out from his shadow.

“Right now, you're against the 2 billion followers of the Roman Catholic Church, and you can escape with just the loss of a single arm. Is that a tough question at all? I thought it was a bargain.”

“The real enemy isn't the Roman Catholic Church, but people like you who treat ordinary civilians as bait and manipulate them when they continue to believe in God.”

“Humph, so the deal broke down, huh?”

“Is there anything else other than that?”

“Not much difference to me, I won’t be bothered by it. On the other hand, you should be worrying... because you just gave up the one chance you had of surviving.”

From his shadow, Acqua pulled out an extremely large mace and easily swung it as if it was a tennis racket to confirm the condition. He then said,

“I’m afraid you forgot, so let me repeat this again. I’m one of the Saints,”

“ ... ”

“And I have the power as a member of God’s Right Seat.”

“ ... ”

“If, after confirming all this, you people still feel that you have to risk your lives to protect that person, I’ll wait for you. The possibilities that humans have, this dream-like thing, I’ll look forward to it for a bit. I’ll take on all your special moves that you exert with full force.”

Acqua had changed.

It was not that he had changed externally like he getting Angelic wings on his back or a halo above his head. However, at this moment, one could feel that his aura had changed.

“And after that, I’ll win.”

Acqua took half a step forward.

This wasn’t for movement, but to help him grip the metal mace better. This meant that he had recognized Tatemiya and company as enemies, and would use all his strength to crush their realizations and resolve; a silent proclamation.

“This thing called winning, it’s not decided by good and evil, but winning and losing, and I’ll prove that to you. What I’m hoping for is for you to at least force me to use a ‘trump card’. If you can’t even do this, I won’t even call you weaklings, but fools—”

But Acqua wasn’t able to finish his words.

CLANG!!

Her patience at her limits, Itsuwa completely ignored the fact that the two were still talking, and immediately carried out a blow meant to kill Acqua.

Itsuwa wordlessly used the Friuli Spear of hers to charge at Acqua at blinding speed, and with the spell ‘Icy Night Wind’ cast on the tip of the spear—it exploded. BAM!! Flashes appeared everywhere, and it was not just Acqua alone getting hit, the neighboring asphalt roads were mercilessly ripped up and crumbled.

They were supposed to be comrades, but Tatemiya was shocked by this sudden attack as he turned his head around.

“It-Itsuwa...san?”

Showing a painful expression, Tatemiya said softly, but Itsuwa didn’t look back at all. One could see from her shoulders that she was extremely nervous.

Seeing the dust flying about in the air, Itsuwa readied her spear and slackened her chin.

The mace, being used like a grey window handle, pulled open to scatter the dust, and the unhurt Acqua appeared inside.

“Shouldn’t you listen to other people’s words till the end?”

“...If you have something to say, say it later.”

Forget about being afraid, Itsuwa actually said this as she took a step forward bravely.

“AFTER I BEAT YOU TO A PULP OVER AND OVER AGAIN!! IF YOUR JAW ISN’T ALL BROKEN, I’LL LET YOU TALK ALL YOU WANT!!”

Itsuwa’s plain expression seemed to have some abnormal force gathered on her forehead. The huge shout felt like it could break even her cheeks. Hearing this, the Amakusa members could only hug their heads painfully and exchange looks with each other.

“(...AHHH!! THAT ITSUWA, HAS SHE COMPLETELY LOST IT!?!?)”

“(...BECAUSE SUPREME PONTIFF-SAMA, YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT ‘PROVE THAT YOU’RE THE BEST GIRL’ IN THE HOSPITAL. WOULDN’T THAT CAUSE ITSUWA TO GO ALL OUT!?!?)”

“(...You’re really an idiot. Even if it’s God, a girl in love will still charge on.)”

In contrast to the males who were making a commotion, the females were so calm it makes others feel intrigued.

Ignoring this, Itsuwa continued to glare angrily at Acqua.

From who knew when, the focal point of the Amakusa had changed.

“Humph, you have guts, but can you back up your words with action? Let me enjoy this a bit.”

“Don’t worry, even if we’re reduced to a slice of meat, we’ll LET YOU REGRET ALL YOU DID AFTER BEATING YOU TO MEAT PULP!!”

“EH EH!! DO WE HAVE TO GO TO THIS EXTENT!?” Ignoring the cries behind, Itsuwa again took a step forward.

The two of them were within attacking range, and ignoring Tatemiya Saiji, who was standing there blankly, a huge battle began.

Part 6

On the metal bridge in the middle of the night, explosions could be heard.

As a Saint, Acqua had tremendous power as compared to Itsuwa, an ordinary human, so there was a definite advantage in speed. Acqua moved at a speed that was like vanishing to a human’s naked eye and attacked Itsuwa head on. He let the muscles in his body expand instantly, and the large mace slammed down towards Itsuwa like a guillotine.

In terms of movement, Itsuwa was slower by half a step, and finally managed to move her spear.

Stabbing the spear into Acqua’s attacking trajectory, Itsuwa tried to block his attack. However, nothing could block this one hit from Acqua.

However.

“Ugh!!”

With the sounds of rocks colliding with each other, Itsuwa’s spear received Acqua’s mace.

Normally, Itsuwa’s body would be crushed together with the Friuli Spear and blown away.

“This spear...?”

“Hehe, I made about 1,500 layers of resin on it.”

The two people’s weapons let out some squeaking sounds as they continued to bite into each other. Itsuwa smiled and said,

“The symbol behind this are the age rings of a tree, and the spell hidden within is the ‘reproductivity that plants possess’—until the spell reaches the end of the world, as time passes on, the hardness will continue to increase. I’ll let you see how much endurance it can gain after every second.”

“Take this power of the ‘scattered grass’,” Itsuwa declared.

“But there are other spells used as well...”

“...Things from ancient times, in all sorts of civilizations, why are things like clothes created? I suppose that I don’t have to tell you the significance behind this spell, right?”

Looking closely, one could see that a patch of clothing on Itsuwa’s abdomen was torn unnaturally, revealing the white skin underneath. It seemed like the damage done to Itsuwa had been transferred there.

“‘To protect a person’s body’... this is the most important significance. But then again, it’s just a spell to weaken the damage; it isn’t one omnipotent spell that can negate all sorts of damage.”

During the last battle, Acqua hadn’t seen such a thing, and right now, they were using these spells without holding back. In other words, the Amakusa members were able to create such efficient spells on the fly.

But what shocked Acqua wasn’t this.

(She matched up well against my speed...?)

Acqua was a Saint, his speed should have been overwhelming, and not something that a human could follow. Normally, Itsuwa should be unable to even flick a finger before she got crushed.

But in reality, this wasn’t the case.

Though she was slower by half a step, Itsuwa had still managed to catch up to him in the end. Though she hadn’t had time to turn defense into attack, she had still managed to defend herself well.

(Why?) Being puzzled, Acqua quickly figured out the catch behind this.

This group of approximately 50 Amakusa members had a certain rule when moving. Instead of just having a different formation to make battling a lot more effective, there was a unique rule behind this. If Itsuwa was the focal point, the focal point would be moved somewhere else. If anyone wanted to pursue the center, the center would be scattered into the crowd and disappear, and just when they prepared to ignore the center, Itsuwa would again be the focal point. It felt like in the group, this thing called the ‘focal point’ had continued to change.

Gathering at the right time, and scattering at the right time. Like sand in an hourglass, each movement had a huge significance.

(A spell that increases visual activity and mobility, huh?)

“Such a little trick...”

This action felt like they were familiar with fighting against Saints, and Acqua frowned uncomfortably. There were only about 20 people with this rare power of being a Saint, thus there were very few people who would actually see a Saint in their entire lives.

(Speaking of which, there’s a Saint like me who exists among the Amakusa-style Remix of Church.)

Because of this, they had probably gotten used to matching up against the speed, arm strength, and reactions. And also, they had the brains of those that had experienced it first-hand, and thus they had managed to come up with this spell to match up against Acqua’s movements.

Acqua brought the mace behind his body, holding it properly again and saw Itsuwa’s expression.

“—However, you’re still too slow.”

“Hm!?”

Acqua again closed in.

Before the gust struck, the mace had already struck Itsuwa. Itsuwa tried her hardest to block the hit, and her clothes automatically ripped to avoid the magic impact. However, the next attack was coming. Itsuwa wanted to swing her spear to knock the strike away, but the last hit had taken a lot out of Itsuwa just at this moment, as Itsuwa was knocked backwards. Faster than even the initial strike, Acqua’s second hit was barely knocked off course by the old Isahaya, and at this moment, the lady Tsushima grabbed Itsuwa by the neck and pulled her out.

The third strike that Acqua sent out directly hit where Itsuwa had previously stood, crushing the asphalt without any mercy.

The entire metal bridge shook unstably.

Even though they managed to avoid the direct hit, the large amount of debris hit Isahaya’s entire body, blowing him away.

Acqua wanted to continue pursuing Itsuwa, but at this moment, he noticed something shiny mixed into the grey dust.

It was like an infrared laser to allow people to see through smoke.

This thin light came from,

Metal wires.

And it was not just one or two.

Carefully discerning this, one could notice that with Itsuwa at center, the 50 Amakusa members all had some extremely thin wires on their fingers. Each person was controlling 7 of these, and in total, this deadly spider web of 350 wires attacked Acqua.

“Humph.”

Acqua didn’t even dodge it.

The extremely fine maze of wires ripping through the air instantaneously bound his entire body, and, with the extreme force exerted throughout the wires, was trying to rip and crush his entire body.

Instead of killing him, it couldn’t even stop him from moving forward for even a single second.

Such a tremendous display of power, this was God’s Right Seat Acqua of the Back.

[—You killed.]

This little voice echoed within Acqua’s ears.

[—You killed me.]

“(I see, so this is the real purpose, huh...!?)”

That moment Acqua gritted his teeth, something like red mist ripped on the wires. This red mist immediately expanded like it was immersed with this painting called the darkness, and soon, it engulfed Acqua’s entire body.

“...The hidden spell within this is ‘A Punishment of a Killer’.”

Standing on the damaged bridge, Itsuwa muttered, and the red mist suddenly exploded from within.

The Amakusa magic caused a huge expansion of this mist, and after creating an inescapable prison, it exploded within the mist. With this technique, no matter how fast the person was, they couldn’t escape.

“This is a spell that allows each wire to have symbolic features of being a person’s lifeline, and then punish the person that destroyed these wires. This is an ancient thing, a spell that any religions has, no matter the culture...in other words, no matter what kind of defensive spell it belongs, it can’t block this ‘Curses of the Fallen’.”

The red mist box that surrounded Acqua expanded twice or thrice, like a continuous bomb explosion in water. Each explosion triggered another chain of explosions. Each of the explosions continued to chain up, and from who knew when, the exterior of the red mist box had become distorted as a bunch of grapes.

It was impossible to do this with just a person’s strength; this was something that the Amakusa used—the ultimate definition of being ‘one entire unit’.

But Itsuwa and company didn’t look relaxed.

BAM!!

The sure-kill technique exploded from within, and expanded out.

This was an explosion that was larger than what the Amakusa had prepared. It was a shockwave stronger than the explosion the Amakusa used to kill. This shockwave easily ripped through the red prison.

The dust and steam mixed together, making the entire place look like a grey screen.

What came from the other side of the screen was a man’s rough voice.

“Then let me tell you my attributes.”

On the other side of the screen, a gigantic man shadow was swaying about.

There was something like a core supporting this vertical shadow.

“My attribute is the Power of God, who has the distinction of informing the Child’s birth. I can use the spells related to the Divine Mother to a certain extent—in other words, I can use the secret ritual of worship the Divine Mother.”

Only the words continued on,

“The Divine Mother’s Worship’s special attribute is—‘to weaken the punishment’.”

Only the voice of God’s Right Seat, Acqua of the Back continued on.

Occupying this entire world.

“The believers get saved, and also, punishing those who don’t obey suitably, that’s another attribute of the Power of God. With this special attribute of weakening this through the worship of the Divine Mother, it’s like helping a woman escape from a monastery, helping her take attendance, and continuing to cheat the watching eyes until the woman comes back.”

Silently, the figure moved.

Ripping through this window that was formed by dust and steam, the human figure moved forward.

“Unlike the Son of God who was born as the Son of Man, God and the Holy Son, the Divine Mother was an ordinary child, but at the same time, she and God have a bond that can’t be separated, it’s this rare existence. Using this logic, the Divine Mother has this attribute of ‘being a middle person that’s able to surpass anyone’s mercy and transfer the suffering of those severely punished to God’.”

The voice echoed throughout the air.

High and mighty, not even trying to hide.

“—Then now, I’ll tell you the conclusion. My attribute is the ‘Divine Mother’s Mercy’ that negates any punishment. Even if they’re strict and just final judgment, they can be overturned. It even directs whether a person is going to Heaven or to Hell. No matter what kind of guilt one has, the punishment will be nullified. To me who has this attribute, your attacks are meaningless. I don’t even need to move a finger to ignore this sin of ‘killing’. And for me, able to even to negate ‘God’s Sin’, do you think you can use this ordinary spell to beat me?”

Explosions could be heard.

The grey screen surrounding Acqua was immediately blown away.

“Humph, you should have listened to me till the end.”

Acqua placed the huge mace on his shoulder, looking extremely bored as he sighed.

There wasn’t anyone else around. The 50 Amakusa fighters had carefully used a diversion spell that let people detect a false ‘human presence’ even while they escaping.

He was standing on the bridge, alone, but he revealed the kind of smile that a hunter would have when he was hunting his prey.

“Well, let’s just say you just increased my fun in hunting you down.”

Part 7

With Tatemiya Saiji leading, the Amakusa members moved to a small plaza 300m away from the metal bridge. When they had cast ‘a Punishment of a Killer’, the moment they saw the spell break, they had immediately used this high-speed escape spell to run away.

But it was just a temporary effect.

Acqua had such tremendous strength that it was easy for him for him to detect a human presence or magic flow. Also, in this sealed underground space, the number of places they could hide was limited—also, there was an absolute reason why the Amakusa couldn’t run away.

“He managed to break through it in the end. What do we do, substitute Supreme Pontiff?”

Ushibuka kept the metal wires that were now cut into something like fluff as he waited for Tatemiya to give the next instruction.

“...It would have been great if we could beat him using that just now. Seems like things aren’t that easy.”

Tatemiya wielded the large wavy sword in his hand as he looked at the surroundings.

Though the Amakusa had shown that they could match up to Acqua’s mobility, it did not come cheaply, for if a group of about 50 people could continue to match up against a Saint’s movement speed, the Amakusa were worth even more than a Saint.

“There’s a limit to how much we can fool him.”

Itsuwa exhaled heavily to adjust her breathing as she said this.

Actually, the key behind that body strengthening spell was touching people on the back. The spell hidden within this was the ‘recovery spell inserted from behind’. They continued to change formations as they fought, the moment they moved and crossed each other, their comrades would pat each other on the back, recovering their body functions and immediately getting stronger. It was not a spell that a lone person could do; it was a group-exclusive movement spell that worked ‘for their comrades’. Also, the effects would be even better with the fengshui effect of a ‘pulse’ like a ‘sleeping corner’ or ‘rest point’.

With their comrades helping, the effect of the increased mobility was enhanced, allowing them to be able to match a Saint’s speed. However, the enemy had broken through this formation, causing the strengthening rhythm between their comrades to be broken and them being unable to catch up. A break in one place would affect the entire chain, finally causing the entire group to be slow.

With this, there was no way they could beat Acqua of the Back.

A Saint was such a monster.

“Seems like we can only use the ‘origin’. According to how the Son of God was executed, we’ll start our counterattack with Itsuwa at center. Don’t feel regretful, make your resolve and head on.”

Tatemiya looked around, and especially at Itsuwa, waiting for a response from everyone.

At this moment, Itsuwa held the Friuli Spear tightly with both hands as she nodded her head.

At this moment.

A strong chilly atmosphere touched everyone’s skin, a gigantic presence ripping through the night and quickly approaching. There was no need to guess who this presence belonged to, there was no one else but Acqua.

For the Amakusa, their ‘favorite’ battle plan still remained.

But even then, as that was their ‘favorite’, it was not something that could be activated so easily.

“Well, let’s get our positions ready first!!”

Tatemiya shouted, and the entire group of Amakusa members moved out like waves.

However, they were not moving front, back, left, right, but ‘down’. They placed their hands on the floor filled with small tiles, and after that, there appeared a 1 square meter area wide helicopter-entrance like thing. What was waiting on the other side of the entrance was an underground space made of reinforced concrete.

The place was filled with staircases and handlebars that were covered with moisture, and large, thick pipes intercrossing with each other. As if she was being held down by a large and loud machine, Itsuwa slipped between the gaps below. Only at this moment did she realize that this was a hydroelectric turbine power plant.

This was another level below the level full of underground streets, the depth was about 10m, and the space was only appropriate to carry out all sorts of daily necessary activities.

Tatemiya, Itsuwa and the rest slipped through this small space as they set up wires and trap spells all over the place. Though they didn’t feel that they could beat Acqua, they just hoped to delay him for a while.

The real aim of the Amakusa was down below.

As long as Acqua went down from the third level to the fourth level that was full of traps, they would have enough time to prepare the 'favorite' spell of theirs.

““Since you have prepared such a nice thing for me to see, I should give something back in response.”“

Without knowing when, the deep voice of the man echoed throughout the dark underground space.

The voice seemed to have echoed a few times, so they couldn't tell where it came from.

““As one with the attribute of Power of God, you should know what I can do.”“

“!?”

They didn't even have time to respond.

Suddenly, a huge pipe inside this large space of cement broke from within. Greater than 1m in diameter, 5cm thick, the super tube got ripped apart like paper, and debris as large as guitar picks scattered in all directions, causing orange sparks to fly all over the place. The high-velocity metal pieces that flew over collided with the cement, knocking about everywhere.

““Water is something that can change easily; you can even use it to make a bomb if you use it well.”“

CLANG!! The pipes everywhere started to explode one after another.

As if they were forced open by water and steam, the large amount of metal pieces ended up being a rain of shotgun rounds. Itsuwa barely managed to react in time as she blocked a piece of metal that was aimed at her face with her spear, but she tripped down due to the impact.

Though she was extremely mindful about the destructive power, there was something that she was even more mindful of.

Before the water pipe had broke, she seemed to have seen some shiny word.

The shiny word that had appeared seemed to be 'Laguz'.

This word that was like a marking was,

“What... a water rune?”

Extremely ordinary. As it was too ordinary, it could be considered a very symbolic form of magic.

““This reaction...seems like you learnt something about God’s Right Seat when I sent Terra’s corpse over, right?”“

According to the Anglican Church report, as the members of God’s Right Seat had bodies that were more akin to angels, they had the ability to use unique spells, but could not use the ordinary spells that a normal magician could use. This should have been the case...

““But is this really something shocking? Truly, God’s Right Seat can’t use spells that ordinary humans use, but I do have the spell of the Divine Mother’s Worship, which releases me from these limitations, bonds, and constraints.”“

Having the two powers of being a Saint and a member of God’s Right Seat at the same time,

He had completely mastered human and Angelic spells.

““Don’t you put me, Acqua of the Back, on the same level as the other members of God’s Right Seat!”“

(Ku...!!)

After that, another few pipes broke, and the water turbines that were used to generate electricity exploded as they attacked there. The huge turbine swung about like a rotating blade, and on seeing it slowly coming closer, Itsuwa leapt past the metal handle and jumped down. She used her spear to break through the door on the ground that was like a duct, and quickly got outside. It was the bottom of the third level, near the ceiling of the fourth level.

In this space that was about 20 meters from the surface, the thin metal passages and stairs around were all intercrossed. Such a scene was like a dance stage, and below Itsuwa, it was the street of the fourth level—not really. What was actually below her was the huge planetarium screen. The camera image of the surface that formed an artificial sky covered the entire screen, and the cloth used for the screen was supported by thin pillars and wires hanging in mid-air.

But Itsuwa had no time to notice these strange scenes.

“...!! Where’s Acqua!!”

“Over here.”

Just as Itsuwa felt that she heard Acqua's voice, the giant wind pressure whipped up. Itsuwa instinctively moved her spear once she saw where this wind pressure was coming from and prepared to take the heavy hit from the enemy—just as Itsuwa thought of this, her body got blown away about 15m, together with the spear that she was using as defense.

She could hear the sound of metal being ripped behind her.

Itsuwa finally managed to endure the huge damage on her entire body and prepared to make her next move, but there was no place for her to place her footing. Without any ideas, Itsuwa could only let her body land on the giant screen.

However, what was unexpected was that the screen didn't rip, but supported Itsuwa's weight. It seemed like the screen was specially done to stop anything that fell from ceiling, and had this special job of being a guardian.

Not mindful about being unable to stand properly, Itsuwa wielded her spear properly and looked in front.

Acqua of the Back.

He was holding onto a huge mace that was of a different league from Itsuwa's spear, and he jumped off the railing and landed on the screen.

"Then, the trial will end here."

Readying the mace that he was carrying on his shoulder, Acqua calmly said.

"Since both sides are holding weapons, there's no reason not to attack each other."

"...That seems to be the case."

Itsuwa seemed to respond as she pointed the Cross-shaped spear tip at Acqua, saying with a heavy tone.

"But I'm not your only enemy."

After that, the helicopter holes on part of the ceiling opened up one by one. The Amakusa members all appeared here, and all of them were injured. There were blood stains on their clothes, but none of them landed yet.

50 people in all, 100 eyeballs were capturing Acqua's figure.

In contrast, the monster didn't even feel fear.

"No problem."

Calmly.

He didn't even take a single step, just letting his center of gravity descend.

“Bring it on.”

The moment he said this, all the Amakusa members charged down at Acqua of the Back.

Part 8

From the front, Itsuwa charged at Acqua directly.

Before Acqua, who was standing on the screen that was meant to show a sky, could respond to Itsuwa's movements, some sword-wielding Amakusa youths started to attack him from the left, back and above.

About 20 blades were aimed at Acqua's body, and even if Acqua avoided these, there were 30 more blades left.

For a normal human, this was something that he couldn't handle.

But Acqua did it.

The huge mace ripped the air, and being in mid-air, Ushibuka and Kouyagi were blown away. The deliberately invoked shockwaves that rippled out struck others, and ignoring the Amakusa members who had their formation all messed up, Acqua turned around and slammed his mace straight down from behind.

This entire chain of events was just like an explosion.

With Acqua at the center, the formation of the Amakusa was blown away, all the members were sent flying back in all directions.

“!!”

Wanting to add on with another attack, Itsuwa suddenly realized something and stopped her feet.

At this moment, Acqua's body was gliding as if he was skating on ice.

As if he was aiming for the hole left in Itsuwa's defense, Acqua raised his mace and aimed at her from a diagonally high position, before swinging it down as if he was trying to crush her skull.

This was a lightning bolt formed by iron.

But this hit missed Itsuwa.

Acqua felt that he missed his attack, and Itsuwa, who was supposed to be within striking distance, vanished. Looking closely, he found that the light-colored sweater that Itsuwa had been wearing was hanging on the tip of the mace. Acqua turned his eyes to the front, and slightly farther away, Itsuwa was standing there. It was unknown what sort of spell she had used; she was still wearing her clothes, and only her sweater was abandoned.

Acqua easily swung the mace and tossed the cloth on it over.

“So you used this as a scapegoat, huh?”

“But I’m unlucky, there’s not many things to use as a scapegoat.”

Itsuwa readied her spear as she said silently.

“Please don’t make me do something too embarrassing.”

Before both of them could finish, they clashed again.

Acqua’s mace looked like it could cut through the floor easily.

But in contrast to before, Itsuwa and her spear were enhanced, and all these efforts were meant for her to be able to match up against a Saint’s movements. One hit, two hits, three hits, though she was slower than Acqua by half a step, Itsuwa managed to deflect all his attacks at least.

“Nice movements.”

Acqua raised the mace in his hand quickly as he honestly praised his enemy.

“But even though you’re doing well, your movements are slowly getting slower.”

“Ke...!!”

The difference between the two was slowly widening, and once this difference widened to a certain extent, Itsuwa would definitely be unable to block Acqua’s attacks and would be reduced to a pile of meat.

In order to support Itsuwa, Tsushima, Isahaya and many other Amakusa members attacked Acqua from all angles, but got blocked by the protective wall formed when Acqua swung his mace at a terrifying speed. Fighting against Itsuwa and yet still managing to easily hold the surrounding Amakusa members down, once he seized any chances, the rune word would shine and appear, and the high-pressure compressed water would be reflected over.

While they were continuing on with their ferocious attacks, Tatemiya and Itsuwa exchanged glances.

“(...Is ‘that’ thing ready yet!?)”

“(...No time left, do it...!!)”

“IT...!!”

In order to readjust their current situation, Tatemiya tried to call Itsuwa, but at this moment, Acqua came attacking with another strike. Though Tatemiya managed to instinctively block the strike with his large wavy sword, the impact caused Tatemiya to bounce on the huge screen twice or thrice.

“Next.”

Seeing Itsuwa’s breathlessness, Acqua raised his mace.

“How much longer can you last? Let me enjoy it.”

With these words, Acqua’s muscles instantly expanded.

It was impossible to get away from his striking distance.

The giant mace clashed with Itsuwa’s spear. Though she managed to avoid a direct hit, this was already Itsuwa’s limit. Every time the two weapons collided, like some missing gear parts, Itsuwa’s speed would drop at an obvious rate.

There was no room for any counterattack.

There was no way to completely block the shockwaves caused by Acqua’s hits, as the shockwaves hit the screen that they were standing on. Maybe the screen was reinforced with some special bulletproof fiber, but it still got ripped easily like stockings.

This hell that continued to sap strength was like a marathon.

But in this marathon, the runner’s back was against a large blender that could grind humans into meat sauce.

She would die if she stopped.

Even so, forcing her body to continue running would only cause her death once she reached her limits.

The blade and the blunt weapon continued to clash against each other.

“Humph...!!”

Acqua inhaled, wanting to grip the mace even harder and exert even more strength, but at this moment, Itsuwa took action.

She was not heading forward, but rather, it seemed like she was directly running away from Acqua’s frontal attacks, instantly moving backwards.

Dodging it by a few centimeters, it was almost negligible.

If it was someone with Saint-like mobility, like Acqua, this distance could be nullified in an instant. However, to Itsuwa, it was something that determined her life and death. After forcing herself to jump back, she lost her balance, and looked like she could fall anytime.

Itsuwa had no way to carry on with the next action.

Whether it was dodging, or blocking.

“Humph.”

Acqua again adjusted his breathing, preparing to deal the final blow by stabbing the mace forward.

The air was ripped, and Acqua’s speed was like a supersonic jet.

GAKUN!!

But his movement seemed to be restricted by something, as he suddenly stopped.

“Wha...”

Acqua looked at his legs in surprise.

His high movement speed was maintained by a certain type of spell, there was a thin layer of water between his soles and the floor, and like how a skater skates in an ice skating rink, the same principle was used to allow his body to glide.

But this spell had been destroyed without him knowing.

Itsuwa of the Amakusa definitely didn’t have the strength to reverse Acqua’s spell and destroy it. Up till now, she hadn’t done anything like a ritual.

However,

At that moment Acqua he noticed that there was something shiny mixed in it, and it came from the soles of Acqua's feet. There were inexplicable waves that were obstructing Acqua's spell.

Itsuwa wasn't able to take Acqua's attacks directly, and the remaining shockwaves formed had caused the screen that they were standing on the rip. And the look of this ripped screen formed some sort of a position. What was amazing was that this position affected Acqua's movement spell as well.

This wasn't coincidental.

The Amakusa-style Remix of Church wouldn't use any special spells or spiritual items when they used magic. They would use all sorts of daily items, reclaim the magical element hidden within them, arrange and develop all sorts of spells.

And most important,

Even if it was for an instant, Acqua definitely revealed a gap.

Seeing Acqua like this, Itsuwa, who was standing in front of him, revealed a slight smile.

Without mercy, Itsuwa raised her spear at Acqua and charged forward.

After waiting for so long, this moment had finally come, a hit that was like lightning.

A straight line attack that ripped the air, Acqua did a dodging motion for the first time.

"Ugh!!"

Acqua didn't dodge to the front, back, left or right, instead choosing to jump.

It was alright even if it was on the unstable screen, as Acqua was able to jump about 5m after just one jump. He was now standing on one of the pillar that was hanging the screen.

"—TATEMIYA-SAN, EVERYONE!!"

Even so, Itsuwa didn't change her position.

She lowered her body, ready to use the Friuli Cross-tip spear and pointed it at Acqua.

"NOW'S THE TIME TO USE OUR 'FAVORITE'!!"

Itsuwa shouted with her entire body full of strength. The Amakusa members around responded to that call; some were near Itsuwa, some were slightly farther away, but the formation they had now clearly emphasized that Itsuwa was the center this time.

Balancing on the thin pillar, Acqua was looking for a suitable place to land, but at this moment, what he could sense below his eyes was all the willpower and magical power that was gathered on Itsuwa's body.

This was some sort of foreboding, the first wave of something big that was going to happen.

“(So it's coming...!)”

Before Acqua could say this, Itsuwa took action.

A huge explosion could be heard.

The moment Acqua realized that this was the sound of a human stepping on the screen, Itsuwa was ripping the night sky apart like some sort of a rocket or spacecraft. Due to this huge power, some pillars that were hanging off the giant screen were bent. In Itsuwa's hands that were coming near was a small piece of cloth that was like a wet handkerchief. She used this to hold the handle.

“A tube spear!?”

As the friction between the spear and the palms was reduced, the piercing speed and power of the spear had increased many times.

But Itsuwa's aim was different.

“TAKE THIS!!”

She used all her strength to send this strike.

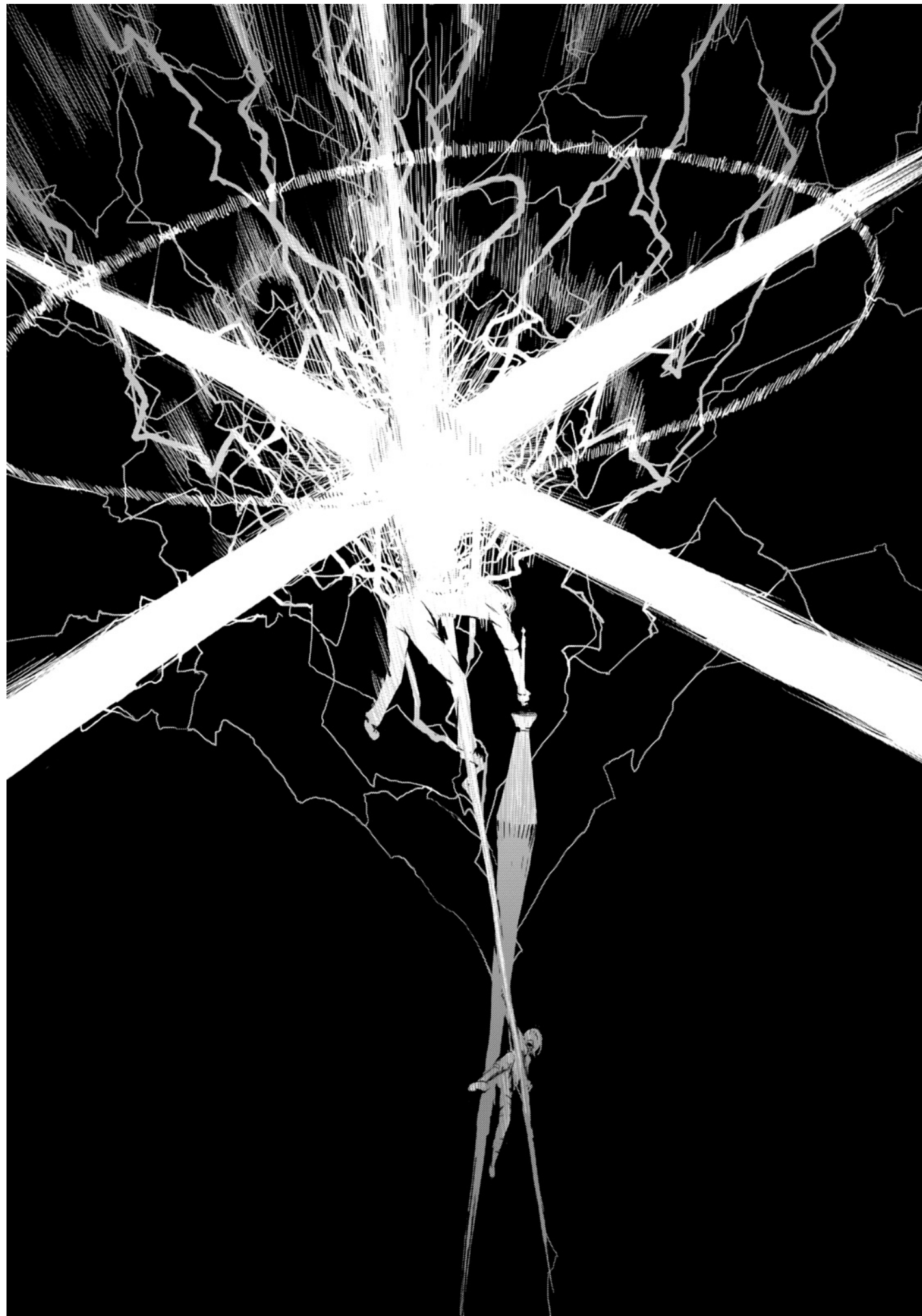
If she didn't do anything to protect her palms, her palms would most likely vanish first while the magic was transferred.

“—SAINT DESTROYER!!”

The spear in Itsuwa's hands exploded.

It was not a metaphor, nor was it a comparison, but rather, Itsuwa's spear really became lightning. This sharp strike that flew in a straight line hit Acqua right in the abdomen, and without mercy, the bluish white purple electricity passed through his body, spurting out from behind, ripping the darkness of the night apart. This huge friction caused the cloth that had been used to hold the spear to let out black smoke.

With this explosion, a lightning cross appeared from Acqua's back, and new explosions continued to occur everywhere.



“...!”

Acqua wanted to say that some valuable and hidden spell was activated.

The spell that Itsuwa—no, all the Amakusa-style Remix of Church members let out, the ‘Saint Destroyer’.

As a Saint’s body was similar to the Son of God, based on the Idol Theory, Saints were able to have similar abilities to the Son of God.

On the other hand, it was possible to seal this power that they called the Stigma that a Saint had; by destroying what made these Saints similar to the Son of God, in terms of specific body features through human means.

A Saint who lost this balance didn’t just lose the power so easily. They couldn’t even control their power, and may end up going rampant.

In the past,

The Amakusa-style Remix of Church had lost a Saint.

As she was a gentle Saint, she was afraid that her tremendous power would hurt people around her, and chose to leave her home. In order to allow her to endure that tremendous power, the Amakusa members made a vow.

One day, they wanted to be able to bear this tremendous power with her.

The next time, they had to reach her back, grab her hand and tell her it was alright. They had to be that strong.

And what they worked so hard on was the ‘Saint Destroyer’.

In order to let her, a Saint, stand beside them, they had to correctly understand what kind of existence she was. Then, they had to climb past that wall, and then they must step up to whatever she felt may be a ‘threat’. Based on this theory, the ‘Saint Destroyer’ was born.

A real one.

A successful spell that the Amakusa-style Remix of Church had managed to create.

A special spell that existed to beat a Saint.

(As the magic went rampant inside his body, the time it takes to solidify is about 30 seconds.)

In theory, this was a spell that only worked on Saints and had no offensive effect on other ordinary magicians. Because of this special attribute, there couldn't possibly be a Saint that would specially come over to be lab mouse. Thus in a certain sense, it was a decisive moment right now.

But the feeling that Itsuwa got from her hands was that they succeeded.

She used that feeling to estimate this effective time.

(Using this time that we have left, let's cause the 'just an ordinary person' Acqua be completely powerless!!)

However,

"Not a bad spell."

This time, Itsuwa's expression was frozen.

The Friuli spear that had been converted into lightning had changed back into its original shape from who knew when. Itsuwa hadn't given any commands, so this meant that an external force had forced the spell to be reversed and negated.

Acqua's left hand was on his hip.

He was not pressing against any wound, but at the place where his skin nearly got touched, he managed to use his hand to grab the tip of Itsuwa's spear.

Most likely, before Itsuwa's spear turned into lightning, Acqua forcefully grabbed the tip of the Friuli spear; and the reason why those special sparks had appeared was likely because he had done something to it before it fired, causing the effect to leak out slightly from the tip of the spear.

"If I were just a Saint, I would most likely have been finished off."

Acqua's lips curled in a distorted manner.

This wasn't a mocking smile, but rather a delighted smile that showed that he had met a strong enemy.

"But that's too bad."

His left hand grabbing onto the spear, Acqua slowly moved his right hand.

A 5m+ mace that was completely made of iron.

“—BUT JUST AS I’M A SAINT, I’M A MEMBER OF GOD’S RIGHT SEAT!!”

The explosion occurred within the plaza where no one was.

Itsuwa didn’t even have time to use her clothes as a scapegoat.

The moment Itsuwa noticed that her body made all these noises, her breathing had stopped. This vertical hit that came from above caused her to fall through the bulletproof fiber screen that was ripped apart, falling about 20m down.

“KYAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!”

As she fell, she could see several layers of defensive barrier spells opened, and they likely belonged to the Amakusa members. Itsuwa herself was also using one, trying her best to slow her falling speed. However, these spells were all broken through, and Itsuwa’s body landed hard on the asphalt floor.

The grey dust danced about in the air.

Battered pretty badly, Itsuwa was buried in the asphalt, and the only part of her body she could move was her head. She looked up at the sky, and saw that on the screen, with a sound of waves hitting a rock, a large amount of water spurted out from the crack within the rock. The several tons of water formed a giant hand or a dragon’s jaw. In front of this overwhelming strength, the Amakusa members scattered, and one could hear many cries of agony.

Among them, a shadow gently descended down like a feather.

“How boring. You gathered so many people, and this is the best plan you can come up with?”

It was Acqua of the Back.

He stood beside Itsuwa, who was basically completely defeated, and said silently.

“As for the conditions I was willing to give, you still have a few options.”

Many streams of water continued to flow down the planetarium video screen, and there were mechanical warning sounds. But Acqua was unfazed, he would just beat all the enemies in front of him. He casually said to Itsuwa,

“I’ll let you decide, do you want to hand that boy’s right hand over? Or do you want to be the patterns on the ground here?”

“ ... ”

Itsuwa didn't reply.

But she made her response. She grabbed a piece of debris of the asphalt road and forced her battered body. This bloodied Itsuwa still wanted to stand up.

"If so, looks like I have no choice."

Acqua said silently as he raised his gigantic mace.

"Since you wished for death, I'll let you disappear in all this commotion."

The front tip of the mace was pointed at Itsuwa's head.

DONG!! Such an explosion could be heard.

A waterfall came from the other side of the ripped screen, devastating the water on the fourth level in response to Acqua's call and becoming 20m long. It was just like something that just grew out of the floor; a huge hammer that looked like a cable car joint changed into a beast that prone on the floor, looking for its prey.

Itsuwa didn't close her eyes.

Thus, she was able to sense it till the end.

She sensed that Acqua's hand had stopped.

Suddenly, the entire place was filled with killing aura of an unknown nature.

The source of this killing intent wasn't Acqua, nor was it the Amakusa members around them like Tatemiya and Ushibuka, and it couldn't possibly be the thoroughly injured Itsuwa. The distance and direction were unknown, but there really was killing intent.

Acqua stopped his hand and noticed that his target was moving from one place to another. This something that had forced someone like Acqua to divert his attention was closing in.

"...I see."

Acqua of the Back muttered softly, and then revealed a smile.

Itsuwa had seen this expression from close range before, it was an expression that he would only reveal when he faced a strong opponent. But this time, he wasn't looking at Itsuwa, but rather a look that was a lot deeper than the previous one by many times was engraved on his face.

The block of water moving along the fourth level was dissolved, and the water that lost its magical form became a tsunami that attacked the banks on both sides.

Acqua released the strength from his shoulder and carried the huge mace on his shoulder.

And only once, did he look at Itsuwa's face and said.

“Apparently you got a life back. Thank your master.”

BAM!! This explosion echoed throughout.

The moment Itsuwa thought of this, Acqua of the Back had already disappeared. As he was too fast, the naked eye couldn't catch up.

Itsuwa blankly slumped on where she was, just looking at the front where there was no one.

She had survived.

The iron, asphalt, anything, everything around had gotten crushed like an explosion in the air. The surroundings was just a pile of wasteland, with a large amount of water washing them away. In this pitiful situation, Itsuwa wasn't happy even though she had survived. In this situation, she couldn't tell whether they had been completely defeated. Acqua's words continued to echo in her mind.

“...Thank...your, master...?”

Itsuwa turned her head and looked around.

Though she turned to where Acqua had been standing, there was nothing there. Like Acqua, who had vanished, what was over there was just an endless black night.

Part 9

About 200m away from where Itsuwa had landed.

On the riverside, there was a little observation post. With the 'dispel bystander' spell, there was no one there except for 2 Saints standing on the icy facilities.

One of them was Acqua of the Back.

And the other was...

“Seems like you took care of my 'comrades' quite a bit.”

A slim and tall body, snowy white skin, black hair that extended to her waist even after she tied it. Her clothing was a T-shirt, with a rough material jacket that had the right sleeve ripped up. And the left side of her jeans was ripped off below, revealing her entire thigh.

However, despite such a unique get-up, there was something that was even more eye-catching than them.

The sword that was attached to her belt.

The 2m long katana, the Shichiten Shichitou.

“Speaking of which, there was a Saint in the East that goes by killing everyone with just one strike.”

A Saint that belonged to any country or association wasn’t allowed to anyhow go anywhere. Even though this Saint was taking some risks, she still chose to stand in front of Acqua.

He gripped his mace.

The meaning behind this was basically that he didn’t need to bully the weak and could enjoy all the pleasures of battle.

“I heard that the Amakusa Saint seems to hate fighting. So do you have any intentions of fighting against me?”

“That’s right.”

She said,

“I have that kind of personality, but it seems like I’m a lot more immature than I thought I would be.”

Kanzaki Kaori said,

“But seeing them get beaten one by one, that won’t do. That won’t do at all. I bear that kind of a magic name. ‘Wrath’ is one of the original seven sins; at least I was supposedly taught that way.”

The Saint that was called Priestess-sama felt like she was blowing all the darkness of the night and the rubble away.

She was just standing there.

“Stop worrying about someone. I won’t let their efforts go to waste, that’s just enough.”

For that innocent boy that got violently abused without any reason.

For the group of comrades that had stood up to help that boy and yet were trampled by this overwhelming power.

She looked like she was about to break the hilt of the sword as she gripped it.

The eyes of the two Saints collided.

With this signal...

Among the less than 20 monsters in the world, the battle between these two monsters in the world began here.

Between the Lines 2

The Knights of Orleans.

France's largest magical society and the name of the association that brought this boy despair.

This 'association' was originally a volunteer association attracted by Saint Joan's deeds, and unlike the combat strength that everyone recognized, this group supported Saint Joan from the shadows. Also, at first, they had not been some enhanced special magic 'group', they had just been people who wanted to save France, regardless of their identity, their status, and (rare at that time) there were nobility and peasants. All sorts of people standing side-by-side, laughing together, it should be that kind of an 'association'.

But in year 1431, 30th of May, something major happened that altered their course.

Joan of Arc, who had been captured by the English, was burned under the sin of being a heretic.

From that day on, the Knights of Orleans became another abnormal 'association' that existed to 'avenge Joan'. The revenge on the English that killed Joan was to be expected, and also other French soldiers, nobility, those that hadn't saved her, those French citizens that hadn't done anything to bring Joan's body back, the association treated them as their targets for revenge (strictly speaking, they intended it but did not manage to do it, it was not like they were an 'organization' that would consider whether it was appropriate), and the number of people targeted for 'revenge' increased.

Even if it was the largest magic association in France, if it wanted to declare war on these people, the chances of them winning was still slim. However, they themselves didn't know that.

The Knights of Orleans had a hope.

Saint Joan wasn't naturally born with any special ability. When she was 13, she heard a 'special voice', and after which, her powers started to bloom.

The Orleans' Knights were always looking for this 'Oracle of Joan'.

Unlike Joan, who wanted to protect people, these Knights did this only in the name of revenge.

To those who only whispered and prayed for a miracle, God wouldn't lend them a hand, so why didn't the members of the organization notice that? Of course, the Knights of Orleans became an 'association that looked for mysteries', making them even more involved in magic.

A few hundred years had passed, and the members of the Knights of Orleans had switched for several generations. They wanted to create someone that had Joan's powers, and the 'experiment that could possibly succeed' was still continuing.

A boy and a girl were involved in this experiment.

The girl designated as the essence of the 'Oracle of Joan' could be said to be forcefully taken away. The boy wanted to resist, and he thought of all sorts of ways, using his entire strength to fight on—and failed.

Right now, the boy had lost the girl beside him.

The dying boy last heard the words of the girl: "I trust you".

But the boy didn't even have any strength left to stand up.

For if he had that strength, he would have used it a long time ago.

The boy lay alone silently on the dirty ground.

"So are you going to continue lying down here and give up on everything?"

He heard a voice.

A strong man who called himself a mercenary.

Seemed like he had come all the way to France to stop the Knights of Orleans. Over here, he met a boy and a girl, and he had done a diversionary attack in order to allow the girl to escape...but the boy in the center of the battle was too weak, causing the girl to be taken away in the end.

"I don't know what to do as well."

The boy lay on the ground, muttering to himself.

If he stretched his hand out, he would be able to reach the sword encased in the scabbard. It was a French fencing sword that was modified for military use, one that the boy could easily use due to its lightness. And at the moment, the boy's thoroughly wounded arm felt like it was afraid of touching hot water, all cowardly and not wanting to touch the sword scabbard.

"I'm not some special guy, not some person that can guarantee that everything will be fine as long as I'm around!! I can't win; the enemy's the largest magic association in France! You're asking me to fight against people like that!!?"

"So are you going to abandon her?"

"..."

"Because you couldn't, you stood up, right? Now how long are you going to lie down there?"

"..."

The boy didn't respond. He couldn't respond.

He moved the beaten and battered body that was covered in mud and wounds, and finally managed to lift his upper body, but this was already his limit. In addition to his physical strength, his mental strength was quite exhausted.

The mercenary didn't mind.

"There's no time for you to be stuck in this worthless despair."

No matter how many times the boy tried, the mercenary didn't have any intentions of helping him, instead reaching his hand out to the sword that was kept in the scabbard.

"The enemy's strong. If they carried their plan out for their goals, you and I know that girl's future. Then, don't you just need to think of only one thing?"

At this moment, the mercenary deliberately paused.

"Even in that situation of despair, she still said 'I trust you'. Right?"

The time in the boy's body froze.

Only the words of the mercenary continued.

"So what are you planning to do? Are you going to stand up and protect that foolish girl's dream? Or are you going to give her more despair by teaching that foolish girl what reality is?"

The mercenary grabbed the scabbard and brought the hilt in front of the boy's nose just as he was lying down on the ground for who knew how long.

"Decide, which one will you choose?"

There was no need to worry.

There was no need to ponder at all.

The problems in front were a lot, and all the possible risks were as many as the stars, but these were unimportant. Only the people who took action had the right to worry and ponder about this.

The boy stood up.

Ignoring the immense trauma, he grabbed the hilt of the sword that the mercenary held over, removed the lock on the weapon and pulled it out.

"—Nice choice."

The mercenary smiled.

The boy's expression changed. He stood beside the mercenary, the same position, and walked into the dark exit together with his comrade—while continuing to look at the 'secret base' with the enemies he must beat and the girl he must save.

"Let's go."

The boy said silently.

"The time to be afraid is over."

The enemy was the largest magic association in France, the Knights of Orleans.

The largest professional fighting association in France continued to act in revenge, and the counterattack of their opponents began.

CHAPTER 3

The Duel to the Death between Entirely Different Monsters.

Saint_VS_Saint.

Part 1

How could anyone not hear the sound of the Earth breaking?

The sound had already surpassed the level of explosions and sonic booms; it was no longer within acceptable human range. It was the world's cry of agony. Every single aftermath of this cry was lost in storms or gusts of winds that uprooted the trees along the streets, causing the concrete on the 4th level to tremor and bend the metal handrails like sugar.

Kanzaki Kaori and Acqua of the Back.

On the streets filled with a scientific atmosphere, the two Saints clashed. This was everything that was happening on the observatory in the middle of the night.

“Hhhhhhhaaaaaahhhhhhhh!”

Kanzaki let out a loud cry as she used a god speed sword-drawing technique. Using the idea of manipulating other teachings to counter a specific religion and cause damage to the opponent, even the angels in a monotheistic religion could be sliced in half. This was Kanzaki's killer move.

If Christian spells were ineffective, she would use Buddhist spells.

If Buddhist spells were ineffective, she would use Shinto spells.

If Shinto spells were ineffective, she would use Christian spells.

Using such a method to mask the weaknesses of other religions, a one-of-a-kind spell filled with destructive power.

Single Flash, Yuisen.

No matter how great the numbers or how strong the person, no one should be able to survive it.

Acqua's huge mace blocked the strike and, after trading a few hits, it was clear to Kanzaki that Acqua likely knew as many spells as she did, possibly even more. Since Acqua was not an ordinary member of God's Right Seat, he was even able to cast ordinary magic spells.

To bypass this, Kanzaki switched from Buddhism to Shintoism, but Acqua immediately changed his defensive stance. The huge amount of magic clashing between them continued to change, and in this supersonic battle another element was currently underway: A mental battle called "reading the moves".

Science and magic.

Body and spirit.

Chaos and order.

Their weapons continued to clash with each other, sending sparks flying. In this battle between two Saints, one thing was glaringly obvious.

Normally speaking, talent was not required to master magic: Magic was originally something that existed to allow people without ability to create miracles like someone with ability, but how could anyone say such a thing after witnessing this battle between two who resided within the special existence called Saint?

"... how exciting. For just one person, you people sent in your entire group. I'm truly impressed. Even I, as an enemy, have to be impressed with that boy."

Acqua waved his five meter-long block of metal as easily as if he were waving a twig, "But be warned: Since you have placed yourself as my enemy on this battlefield, the only future you face is being defeated by my hand!"

Another explosion cut through the air.

Once Kanzaki felt the surface of the black stream behind her beginning to move, a twenty-meter column of water had already risen. Like a huge jointed hammer, it swept past the ceiling of the underground street at a terrifying pace, slamming down against Kanzaki. Kanzaki, who was already having a difficult time dealing with just Acqua's metal mace, would die if she was unable to handle this other threat.

The sound of cutting was heard.

Around Kanzaki, fighting in a death match with Acqua, something was shining. The moment Acqua noticed, the seven strikes hit the water hammer created by Acqua of the Back and caused it to return to the stream it originated from.

The Nanasen created by the steel wires.

“... I'll be really insulted if you think that this is my full power.”

Kanzaki moved her lips, and the seven strikes seem to be correcting Kanzaki's sword trajectory as they assaulted Acqua from all angles. Acqua quickly increased his attack rate in response. Using his mace to block, turning his head to avoid, in front of Acqua, who continued to manipulate the sword and the wires—suddenly, a strong red flame surrounded him.

“—Eh?”

The steel wires scattered in the air became a three-dimensional magic array. The moment Acqua realized this, the lotus flames swallowed his entire body. A second explosion followed, then a third, then finally a slash from a blade basked in moonlight. The sounds of continuous attacks could not be heard. It was happening too fast; the sounds had become indistinguishable. The deafening noises that had been delayed for a few moments felt like a giant fist ready to rip the air apart.

But Acqua was not there.

Moving away from the direction Kanzaki was looking, Acqua flew to the concrete floor ten meters in front of him.

A cut was on his face. Maybe he had cut by the steel wires; it was a small cut, after all. Despite the cut's small size, however, it was a rare wound, one of the few inflicted upon him despite the huge number of people he had fought against in his lifetime. The red fluid flowed down Acqua's face, and he said silently, “As expected of a member of the Amakusa; you people are all basically the same.”

He used his index finger to wipe away the blood left behind, and then pressed the fingertip on the side of the mace, writing something of an unknown meaning, “But there is a remarkable difference when it's being done by a Saint. The thing called ‘Talent’ is truly cruel.”

Throughout history, magic had always been the savior of people without talent; however, this truth was meaningless before those known as Saints, who were blessed by God.

Facing this speech by her opponent, Kanzaki temporarily turned silent.

“...”

If he was judging by the results of battle his statement may indeed be true. Without Kanzaki, the current Amakusa couldn't even scratch him, but...

“I hope you can correct your words,” Kanzaki sheathed the sword in her hand, lowering her center of gravity and preparing to draw her sword again. “It’s true they can’t use Yuisen, but the basics of swordsmanship, steel wires, and spells are all passed down from my Amakusa ancestors. What created all of these isn’t this small thing called talent, but the result of history. Amakusa is my school, my teachers are my comrades. I will never agree with those humiliating words of yours.”

Her hand on the sword grip tightened, “What about you? You understand the kind of power you have, yet you attacked an ordinary high school student without mercy. You have no right to look down on others like that.”

But these words could easily be turned back on Kanzaki. For a certain motive, she had attacked a certain boy. The words she had just spoken may have been punishment to herself as well.

“...To become angry over something as small as that is immature.”

Acqua drew patterns along the mace using his own blood, preparing it as he said this.

Ten meters. To a Saint, it could not even be called a distance.

The scene of confrontation between these two was like a traditional Japanese drama, and yet it felt more similar an American Western.

“The infantryman accidentally met the tank while he was scouting... this is a battlefield, there can’t possibly be any sure-fire strategy or an escape route or safe zone, let alone any gentleman’s rule. These things don’t exist on any kind of battlefield. Purposefully making all the conditions exactly the same, making the chances of winning equal for everyone... such a thing can only be called a sport. These are talents, firepower. Anyone can expect the outcome when an ill-armed infantryman meets a tank. The tank will attack without mercy, and the infantryman will inevitably be dust on the battlefield. Are you telling me your battlefield is different?”

“That is just your reasoning.”

“But you and your people are the ones walking onto my battlefield,” Acqua was not even mocking them, just calmly stating an observation. “Regarding that boy: I wonder which master pulled him up?”

“ ... ”

No warning at all.

Kanzaki took action.

With a speed that would make any professional magician feel the battle in front of them was a mirage, Kanzaki raced into Acqua's arms, and maybe the sheath touched the concrete floor as sparks followed Kanzaki's cuts, but before the sparks could chase up, the Shichiten Shichitou had already started to hack into Acqua.

The clear metallic sound rang out.

The two monsters called Kanzaki and Acqua clashed, both staring into each others' eyes.

"Even after you knew all this, you still treated him as someone who merely got involved! WHY DID YOU STILL USE THE POWER OF A SAINT TO ATTACK HIM!?"

A voice that no one heard of before, one roar that revealed all her emotion. Because Kanzaki and Acqua were both Saints. Or rather, Saints bearing the painful experience of hurting others.

"There are only twenty of us in this world, and even normal magicians are fearful of this existence. You still continue to carry out violent acts without considering the consequences, you bastard!"

"This thing called a reason to fight... what can you do even when you understand it?" In contrast to Kanzaki, Acqua still remained as calm as ever, "Anyone who has confidence in the rightness of their actions has no need to find excuses for the path they have chosen, for their will is shown in their actions. For those with a prepared script, how much of this is real?"

Between these two colliding forces, the superficial magic around them continued to release minor explosions. The words written in blood on the mace activated, and both Saints used the opportunity to increase their distance. Kanzaki slightly backed away from Acqua, who still held onto the huge mace and remained unmoving.

What supported a strong opponent's core may be a steadfast belief...

...But Kanzaki Kaori didn't see it at all.

"Show it to me, Saint of the Far East."

The atmosphere that surrounded Acqua's body expanded two-fold. It was not just words; it was as if the weight and pressure of the entire weapon he held had increased exponentially countless times over.

"I don't want shallow words; I want you to show me your belief through that blade of yours. I want you to show it to me wordlessly."

The Saints clashed again, at a speed none could catch, with a power none could interfere with.

Part 2

Kamijou Touma's eyelids twitched.

This small movement was so tiny no one knew he did it unconsciously. It was almost a spastic movement; slowly, slowly, his eyes forced open the smallest of slits. Even so, his vision was not going to recover within a few seconds, and he could not even grasp distances. After a moment, he realized he was looking at the ceiling of a hospital.

...I...

Kamijou did not know what place he was in, or maybe he had been here before, but his brain was unable to process any of this. Compared to the scene in front of his eyes, the disinfectant alcohol registered far more quickly and with much greater clarity.

...Wha... t's... with... me...

He could feel something stuck to his chest and abdomen. Electrodes attached to him for information collection?

Though the lights in the room were off, Kamijou could feel someone's presence. There was a slight weight on one side of the blanket. Kamijou moved his eyes in that direction and saw Index sitting in the chair, sprawled across the bed as she slept. Though her long hair hid her expression, it seemed she was deeply worried even as she slept.

It made Kamijou's heart ache.

“...”

His lifeless hand resting on the bed finally regained a miniscule amount of its normal strength.

As if responding to his awakening brain, the blood started to circulate more strongly throughout his body.

Acqua of the Back.

Itsuwa.

The Amakusas.



They must have continued to battle even after Kamijou lost consciousness when he was thrown off the bridge, and he really hoped to do the same. Of course, the probability of him hearing “the Amakusa won; there’s no need for you to fight” was not zero, but Kamijou could not find it in himself to conjure such a scenario in his mind. It was not disrespect for the Amakusa. Acqua of the Back was a true monster, and though Kamijou understood that he, an ordinary high school student, should not make an enemy of such an unstoppable power, there was strength in numbers.

Acqua viewed the power residing in Kamijou’s right hand as a dangerous existence. If viewed the other way, it could cause a drastic change in the situation should Kamijou use it. So long as it was his right hand, even a miracle of God Himself could be destroyed.

After confirming the presence of his right hand, Kamijou nodded to himself. He again glanced at Index, sprawled on the bed as she continued to sleep. The poor girl must truly be worried about him.

...Sorry Index, I’ll continue to apologize profusely after this...

But first...

So, let me do what I need to do.

Part 3

BAM!!!

A deafening explosion resounded throughout the night in Academy City.

It was not a storm created by fire, but a storm created by water.

The torrent of water being manipulated by Acqua’s magic passed through the ceiling and formed itself into a giant large hammer; Kanzaki mercilessly used her steel wires to quickly slice it into pieces. The machinery-shaped, several-ton block of water instantly dispersed into steam, where it was again controlled by Acqua, formed into diamond-like things.

Acqua did not just control a “hammer”.

The entire two kilometer stretch of the 4th level could be said to be under Acqua’s absolute control. All water flowing through the artificial streams was siphoned out, every single drop floating in the air before becoming fine strings and scattering across the school, forming a complex and unfamiliar magic array.

The water was shaped countless different arrays and continued to interchange, changing shape and form to create various types of arrays for the singular purpose of serving Acqua's will.

Multiple attacks came at Kanzaki.

Ice spears thirty meters long flew towards her.

Water whips attacked Kanzaki from every direction.

Massive, spherical blocks of ice intercepted paths with one-another.

Among these gaps, Acqua slipped himself in front of Kanzaki.

—Using a tactic to increase the chances of killing his opponent, multiple spells that could each be considered a guaranteed kill were merged together. According to Acqua's prediction, seventy seconds later Kanzaki's movement would be too slow to dodge or intercept and she would be hit with a fatal blow.

"Hm!"

Even after she managed to surpass his expectations, Kanzaki still counterattacked.

In response to an ever-changing water magic array, Kanzaki controlled her seven steel wires and extended them, immediately creating all sorts of barriers. After understanding that she was in a completely disadvantageous situation, Kanzaki's steel wires continued to rip the water lines, distorting the water streams and causing Acqua's magic to either fail or attack Acqua himself.

This was simply another form of electronic warfare, a high-tech battle triggered by magic.

The water and steel wires constantly corroded each other, breaking through the gaps, hiding in deep places, fighting for the supremacy of this limited world.

The world was engulfed by numerous beams of light.

The water Acqua used to form magic arrays and the steel wires of Kanzaki break them.

Acqua, who had complete control of this underground city, and Kanzaki, who was creating the only enemy foothold.

While carrying out this magnificent duel of magic, their bodies continued to use martial arts to fight.

Regardless of which side one spoke of, it was a level no magician could reach. The two who resided in this unachievable level of power continued to engage in a deadly battle for supremacy.

Numerous explosions resounded.

Kanzaki and Acqua's bodies had become mist in the air. The steel objects in their hands continued to swing in numerous directions, missing each other, clashing with each other.

He knows how to use the Divine Mother's Mercy...

Kanzaki gritted her teeth as she controlled her sword, steel wires, and spells.

It was not just because of pain she was showing such an expression.

Acqua admitted he was distorting the strict rules which accompanied Christian spells and rituals, but the Divine Mother's Mercy was never meant to be used in the way it was being used by the man before her. It was *intended* to give the Fallen a chance for salvation. Committing a crime, or even merely straying from the path of salvation, was a tragedy God abandoned hope on. In His place, however, the Divine Mother shed tears for them, smiled upon their dreams, and placed the key to salvation in their own hands. They could then stand up and express the desires in their hearts through the act of prayer, thus activating the spell.

It could be said the intricacies of the Divine Mother's Mercy differed depending upon the person who activated it, and it was in some ways unrelated to the worship of the Son of God. No matter how she looked at it, however, Acqua's use was a perversion of its blessing: The nature of the Divine Mother's Mercy was to prevent and even correct the tragedies created by the gaps within the network formed by the various Churches and their clergymen. The Divine Mother did not exist for Christian society to be disrupted; she existed for a person to kneel down and pray for the safety of their families, friends, and companions... and sometimes even their enemies.

That was the Divine Mother's Mercy.

The greatest Saint in the history of Christianity for her act of giving birth to the Son of God, the most important task in Christianity. In order to allow people to lay down their burdens and achieve salvation, the Divine Mother received the blessings of the angels and birthed the Son of God into this world, walking down the path of trials and tribulations with her husband. The result of those who worshiped her for her feats was the Divine Mother's Mercy.

And right now...

What a thought...!

Even when used as it was supposed to be, the Divine Mother's Mercy was remarkably complex and difficult to understand. This misunderstanding was hampered by countless false reports of objects like idols and tools that could trigger miracles in place of the spell. It was possible to use this basis to determine the fake miracles from the genuine, but Acqua was markedly different from those who would fabricate such a miracle. He was really using the genuine miracle to commit violence and destruction and escape punishment.

"Truly impressive."

Acqua's voice could be heard through the ear-splitting sounds of her katana and his mace colliding against each other.

"This five thousand ton array is two kilometers in diameter, and yet you managed to endure it with your own strength." Acqua continued, "... however, is that body of yours truly at its limit as it appears to be?"

"Eh?"

These words made Kanzaki's movements pause, and Acqua's attacks became even more ferocious in response. Kanzaki looked as if she was about to pull away, but she quickly bounced back and swung her sword. The amount of force Kanzaki exerted when using Yuisen was one an ordinary fighter would find impossible to control, and she was forcing that power as it was. In this condition, such a technique was ill-suited for long-term battles, and Kanzaki's Yuisen was a sword technique used only when necessary and even then only when a kill was guaranteed.

A one-hit kill was an impossible feat when the opponent was Acqua of the Back.

Acqua, who possessed power equivalent to or even greater than Kanzaki as a Saint, also possessed the special attributes bestowed as a member of God's Right Seat, exponentially magnifying the power contained in his body. In this world Kanzaki just so happened to step into, Acqua was casually standing there with a calm smile. Like an angel's serene existence...

Kanzaki gritted her teeth.

The power Acqua boasted as a member of God's Right Seat was The Power of God.

That time, Misha Kreutzev didn't really appear completely...

On that note, Kanzaki recalled the battle she fought against the monstrous existence called an archangel.

But it's strange... I can feel something even greater than that from Acqua...?!



Acqua sent multiple consecutive strikes towards Kanzaki, making her wonder whether her opponent really did have the same capacity as a Saint as she did. Even if he did not, the feeling of power emanating from Acqua easily matched her own.

But this... this was unimaginable.

If he really had as much power as she suspected, he should have destroyed himself with it long ago.

“Ha!”

Kanzaki heard Acqua’s breathing. A moment later, she was surrounded by a sensational feeling. Acqua paused his ferocious assault, storing his strength and preparing to deliver the next crushing blow. His fully-powered hit was coming.

The large mace swung downwards from overhead, and Kanzaki shifted her sword horizontally to block. The moment the mace connected with the blade in her hands, the impact passed from the sword along her wrists, arms, torso, and legs before finally being felt at the bottom of her feet; she registered it all at once. The soles of her boots sunk several centimeters into the hard-tiled floor. The ground beneath her feet changed form with the consistency of mud.

Even though she did not suffer a direct blow, such an impact would have given anyone a severe concussion at the very least. She still endured it and Acqua, who used his entire weight and strength to attack, would soon reveal an opening.

“Woooooohhhh!”

Kanzaki let out a shout as she drew her Shichiten Shichitou, waiting for the perfect timing, the perfect chance, to gain the upper hand in one blow. It was useless. Acqua shifted his mace to block the attack, and only the sound of metal colliding against metal heralded the impact which caused the force within the sword to be scattered. This was the cold reality of her situation.

“It’s been three years since I last fought another Saint. It makes for excellent sport,” upon closer inspection, the smile upon Acqua’s face was empty: Not a single emotion or thought was expressed by it, “but let’s end this. I came here to work, so unfortunately I don’t have much time to enjoy sport.”

“Wha-?!”

Kanzaki was unable to make a proper retort, and could only swing her sword as forcefully as possible, delivering another strong hit.

Acqua had already vanished.

Kanzaki sensed Acqua's existence not through sight, but through presence. He was in the air, having jumped roughly twenty meters. It was not something an ordinary person could do, leaping into the air like a rocket. Acqua, nothing more than a dot in the sky, had the satellite of The Power of God, the Moon, directly behind him.

In the most strict sense, that was not true. It was just a display in the sky formed by the planetarium's image display.

Acqua did a half turn near the ceiling and stepped onto the artificial sky.

"Ugh!"

Kanzaki wanted to immediately close the distance between them, but the damage she had just taken, coupled with the burden she was placing on her body, slowed her movements. During the temporary lull, Kanzaki felt a cold presence pressing down on all sides. What she was feeling was the boundary of life and death only fighters in the midst of furious battle could feel. The huge wave bearing down upon continued to flow through the entire battlefield.

And as for Acqua, who was above her...

"—The Divine Mother shall remove all evil."

In response to Acqua's low voice, the glowing orb behind him gained an explosion-like brightness.

The planetarium screen was wrecked due to overload, and sparks flew to and from every direction, like an unknown countdown was activating countless hidden explosive devices. The real Moon, hidden in the sky far above them, was unable to shine its light in their battlefield, yet an intangible layer of intensive protection could still be felt. An ordinary magician was incapable of such a feat but for Acqua of the Back, member of God's Right Seat who was also a Saint, such a feat was easily manageable.

He was using the Divine Mother's Mercy to perform a miracle.

This is...!

Kanzaki easily deduced the mace surrounded by a bluish-white glow currently possessed a tremendous amount of energy.

"In depicting this power called the Truth of God, LET YOUR MERCY RISE TO THE HEAVENS!"

The moment Acqua roared, he stomped onto the ceiling and quickly descended upon her. Having already been damaged beyond its limits, the fake sky was completely destroyed with this final blow, and the blue silhouette above them became the darkest of blacks once again.

A vertical drop.

A giant mace bore down.

What followed was not a strike, a stab, a shot, an explosion, a break, a split, or even simply a crushing blow.

It was just ordinary pressure.

The sudden charge from above had more than enough destructive power to shatter everything in its path, giving the impression of an asteroid crashing into the Earth.

The world vanished.

Even the sight and sound of the Earth buckling from beneath disappeared.

With the harbinger of this unstoppable blow at the centre, everything within a one-hundred meter radius of the fourth level of Academy City's District 22 collapsed. Acqua's falling impact caused the steel and concrete floor to collapse into dust and leave a massive hole in its wake, a floor with the same hardness as those used in safety shelters.

The world around them collapsed, everything within one-hundred meters falling to the 5th level.

The booms and tremors and dust exploded and scattered everywhere.

The sound of destruction echoed throughout the area.

The water streams and turbine generator were cut off, and the water began to flow downward like a waterfall.

Amidst the shattered aftermath, Kanzaki Kaori lay where she had fallen to the ground.

She had blocked the attack itself using the Shichiten Shichitou, but the ground beneath her feet was ill-suited to withstanding such impact.

Having endured such an unstoppable pressure and falling more than twenty meters, Kanzaki lay atop a pile of concrete, looking up.

She was thoroughly covered in wounds, and even though it was not a direct hit, the force of Acqua's most recent blow corroded her body through her weapon. Trapped between the massive mace in Acqua's hands and the artificial ground beneath her, regardless of whether it was her arms, legs, or torso, a reddish-black liquid gushed out of Kanzaki's body.

Even this one of less than twenty Saints was now in such a pitiful state.

If she endured an attack of the same caliber again, the only possible outcome was death.

However...

Biting her teeth as hard as possible, Kanzaki Kaori wore a look of neither fear nor shock on her face. The only expression on her face was anger.

This was the 5th level below, maybe Kanzaki just so happened to land on a plaza, but the miraculous thing was there were no innocent victims who lost their lives because of this battle. This thought was just a theory at the moment, however: If their battleground was a residential area, or if anyone was simply walking around the plaza... the idea sent chills racing up Kanzaki's back. Though Academy City seemed to have taken some measures to counter such a possibility, this place was much different from the 4th level. There was not even the bare minimum of a 'dispel bystander' spell.

There was no doubt they were both Saints. There was no doubt they were two of only twenty people blessed with such power.

So why? Why must they clash swords for such stupid reasons?

Kanzaki finally managed to lift her thoroughly-wounded upper body, tightly gripped the Shichiten Shichitou which had fallen among the rubble, and said in a lifeless voice, "Acqua..."

In perfect contrast, standing on a thoroughly devastated 5th level, Acqua merely said, "Where is Imagine Breaker?"

He easily carried the mace that had such destructive power on his shoulder, "If I were to destroy every level, one by one, will I find him?"

Giving the impression she was shaking the fresh blood off her body, Kanzaki abruptly stood up, "AAAAAAACQUUUUUUUUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!"

The Shichiten Shichitou swayed in both hands, moving left and right in unsteady coordination.

Maybe she gripped the sword too tightly, as broken fragments fell off her fingernails. Blood continued to flow through the gaps between her fingers, and Kanzaki's insides were severely damaged from being unable to completely endure the most recent of Acqua's crushing impacts. Blobs of blood spurted out of the lips she was trying her hardest to breathe through.

Kanzaki's eyes showed no signs of weaknesses despite her pitiful state. So long as this expression remained on her face, she would continue to swing the sword in her hands.

Maybe she was simply trying to encourage herself, as Kanzaki used her hand to press against her damaged respiratory system and gave a hoarse roar, sending a strike Acqua blocked with his mace. The sound of metal slamming against metal, quickly followed by several more metallic clashes, caused the surrounding air to explode.

A deafening sound exploded through the environment.

The Saints, and the weapons they wielded, collided with one another yet again.

Kanzaki Kaori swung the Shichiten Shichitou at an extremely high velocity, and the seven steel wires moved about as if covering any opening created by her attack. Once she bought enough time, she would sheath her sword and use another quick-draw technique at a blindingly-fast speed. The steel wires would trace a three-dimensional array in the air or aid in her movement, using the rhythm of steel colliding with steel to discharge fire or ice spells. She continued to employ such ambush tactics.

Acqua of the Back, in contrast, used the mace in his hands to block Kanzaki's sword, absorbing the moonlight representing the attribute of The Power of God to greatly increase the offensive power of his attacks. He used the special effects of the Divine Mother's Mercy to relieve the punishment, surpassing the limit placed on members of God's Right Seat which forbade them from using ordinary magic. He maintained a steady barrage of supersonic attacks as he bombarded Kanzaki from all angles with spells like vacuum blades and rocks.

Sparks littered the air as the two clashed. The environment surrounding Kanzaki and Acqua was similar to the night sky they were unable to see.

"Ack, ack?!"

The results were obvious.

In the sky Kanzaki resided in, blobs of blood continued to flow out of the wounds littering her body. She had reached her limit, and one could tell she had suffered numerous blows despite her trying her best not to show it. The speed she was swinging her sword with had obviously gone down, and she could already picture an image of despair in her mind. She could already predict the moment she would no longer be able to match Acqua's impossible speed and suffer the finishing blow. For Kanzaki, who already struggled to keep up, it was impossible to make a comeback and go on the counter-offensive. She had to keep some moves in reserve, and wait for Acqua to make a mistake. Only then did she have a chance to make a comeback.

For Kanzaki, who had already used all of her trump moves, this opportunity would never come. No battle situation was more difficult than not having a trump card still in reserve.

However...

“I told you to shut up!”

What appeared in her mind were the words she had heard when she first met *him* in Academy City. Hearing them, the strength returned to Kanzaki. Her power had returned.

“That doesn’t matter! Do you resign yourself to protecting people because you happen have strength!?”

The boy who had stood in front of the Saint with only a fist, all because of Index.

“No, you don’t, do you!? Don’t lie! You worked to gain power because there was something you wanted to protect!”

Though she did not feel the boy had said the most wonderful thing in the world. This thing called “thinking”... there were many people, and thus many ways to do it. Among them, none could conclude the boy stood right at the top. After recognizing the great power of a Saint and God’s Right Seat residing in a single body and using this power to attack ordinary citizens, anyone could tell the boy had no chance of winning.

He was an ordinary person, but that boy’s act in enduring Acqua of the Back’s attack to protect Itsuwa would never lose to those who thought they were “God-chosen” and acted so high and mighty.

Kanzaki Kaori continued to swing her sword, biting her teeth hard as she thought this.

The reason she saw in the boy’s action...

The belief he had shown when he risked his life...

She would never let the scumbag in front of her who had so much talent, who was being so selfish with such an unimaginable power, get away from her unscathed.

Part 4

Even though the bandages on their bodies were ripped and the blood continued to seep out of their wounds, the fifty members of the Amakusa-style Remix of Church were unconcerned about their physical condition. From the edge of the massive hole in the 4th level, they stood dumbfounded as they observed the furious battle between the two Saints on the 5th level.

The sound of explosions, gusts of wind, shockwaves, aftershocks... the wake of the battle alone was impressive; considering the huge amount of rubble scattered about, however, it was equally amazing no one else had been caught in the crossfire.

Though they were all human, this battle had already far surpassed their abilities, and after the huge maze of magic arrays were blown away they could only continue to observe the two monsters below. Shouts, metal clashing against metal, storms blowing away the steam in the air to form what looks like a vestige of engine trails after a plane flies past. There were many after-effects of every attack and, no matter which it was, should any of the Amakusa members be hit by it they would be instantly reduced to dust. These extremely powerful attacks and spells were being used all over the place.

From their vantage point, it was easy to feel they were observing a galaxy colliding with another galaxy. With this clash, countless stars exploded, space was distorted, everything swallowed by darkness, and new lights appeared again, giving the impression of chasing the darkness away. So what did the two colliding galaxies represent?

One was Kanzaki Kaori. She was their former leader, and right now she loved them in ways they couldn't see, a true Saint among those twenty that existed. The Priestess-sama of the Amakusa was in battle. Most likely, she was protecting the ordinary boy whom Acqua of the Back had targeted, and to protect her Amakusa comrades who Acqua had attacked for protecting that boy in turn.

“...”

They heard the sound.

The sound came from the bloodied Friuli spear that fell from Itsuwa's hands. In order to take on Acqua and help the boy Itsuwa had tried her best to strengthen her spear, but right now all her hard work was like gravel on a road: Scattered about to be trampled on by others.

Itsuwa was not alone. There were others among them who dropped their weapons onto the ground. Some lost strength in their knees, using their hands to support their bodies on the wall. No matter who it was, everyone had the same expression. A powerless look that overcomes everything else.

What exactly are they doing? Itsuwa wondered.

Kanzaki Kaori was fighting for her comrades, but the more she did so the more Itsuwa felt everything she and her comrades had done was being denied. No matter how hard they tried, she and her comrades could not possibly escape from a Saint. *She* was guarding here with those seemingly pitying eyes of hers, and once this place became dangerous, she would step up and proceed to carry out such a high level battle. She did not recognize what her own companions had done. No matter where they went, what they did was only playtime to her.

In the face of this harsh reality, Itsuwa felt her heart crumble. At the same time, in contrast to the gentleness Kanzaki Kaori displayed, what they considered but were unable to do was so minute. This hurt Itsuwa and the rest, but they could not do anything to help; they

were too weak. They could only continue to watch the battle they could not interfere with; they could only watch as their strength and motivation was worn away, bit by bit.

If that boy was here, he wouldn't bother with them.

The simple fact his "comrade" Kanzaki Kaori was here was enough; if he saw her injured, he would immediately rush into the midst of the battlefield without a second thought. This was another definition of strength. Right now, the Amakusa were unable to muster even that small display of strength.

The battle between the Saints raged on below them.

The tremendous power being exerted was such that, even if they were not being hit directly, the hearts of anyone merely watching crumbled bit-by-bit.

Between the Lines 3

The request for help was heard.

But nobody could do anything. It was not like they had any serious injury, it was not like they were far away from their goal, and it was not like they didn't have any transport to get there. The reason why they were not helping was because of their own stand and the political problem.

The one who had sent out the SOS was the British Royal Family's specialized long distance carriage.

In truth, this carriage originally should have had a perfect protection net, in a magical sense. From when the carriage was made, someone quipped that even if this planet was to be cut in half, it was unlikely for this carriage to release an SOS signal. This carriage should already have been strengthened to such an extent, and it was already far stronger than the special nun's habit Walking Church. This was a combination of all the techniques and history of this large magical country called Great Britain; forming the 'Moving Iron Wall', the name for the Royal Family's carriage. No attacker could probably get away with it.

But an SOS could be heard from that carriage.

This thing couldn't possibly happen in ordinary situations.

And the meaning behind it was simple.

This was a 'deal' that arose due to political reasons.

The third princess of England became that abandoned Chess piece.

Along the Straits of Dover, the Knights could only listen silently to that anguish plea for help.

Everyone could only grit their teeth and grip their fists, as if their palms were going to bleed.

The Knights of England were meant to prevent the 3 factions and 4 cultures of England from breaking up, and they were willing to sacrifice their lives in order to protect those from the Royal Family.

The men of the Knights of England who were in planning were often stuck in such harsh conditions. Thus, they were able to guess the situation.

The people who had abducted the third princess of England were the Spanish Astrological Sect. They were one of the few major factions in the Roman Catholic Church. Ever since Queen Elizabeth I buried their Invincible Fleet, there had been quite some history between the Spanish and English magic sects.

The reason why the British Royal Family would completely ignore this was because they hoped to use this chance to launch an attack on the Spanish Astrological Sect. Because of the spread of Christianity during the Age of Discovery, most of the old cultures in South America were still controlled by the Spanish Astrological Sect. England wanted to take this influence of South America back from the Roman Catholic Church and the Spanish Astrological Sect and expand. And the third princess of England didn't really have any huge power. In comparison to a continent, she became a sacrifice.

It was the Knights' job to protect the Princess.

Even if there weren't any cries for rescue, it was natural for them to be near the Princess. Besides, it was impossible for them to ignore this plea for help in front of them.

However,

Only now, only in this instant, did the Knights of England have to become stone.

France had declared that they would settle this magic battle near the Straits of Dover and requested England not worry. In truth, the hidden meaning behind it was that before the battle reached English soil, they wouldn't take action.

" ... "

William Orville walked out of a tent in this camp of the Knights of England.

There was a light that continued to shine opposite the Straits of Dover. That wasn't a light from a lighthouse, the light that came from French territory was the aftermath of the magic attacks launched by the Spanish Astrological Sect.

"Are you going?"

A voice came from behind him.

William turned around, and standing there was the leader of the Knights of England, the Knight Leader. Unlike Acqua, he exuded elegance, and this was because of his upbringing. And because he continued to serve those with the royal blood, he had to understand all the workings and rituals in the castles and palaces.

William Orville however was merely a mercenary who worked for whoever paid him money.

Knight Leader would risk his life for his own country. Normally, those two people were as incompatible as water and fire.

But in reality, both of them would go out and drink when they were free, and Knight Leader tried many times to tempt William to join the Knights of England, but William always refused. But every time, after a battle on any certain place on Earth, he would naturally come back to England just to have a drink. These two were completely different people, whether in terms of status, position, battle methods, way of living; but incredibly, these two identified with each other well.

Thus, Knight Leader knew what William was thinking as he said nothing and walked out of the tent.

"As people who protect the country, you people have things that can't be said, and being the shield of the country's people, this would be seen as the intention of the country. Seems like we can't just casually barge into French Territory and do whatever we want to the Spanish Astrological Sect, right?"

William set the large mace on his shoulder and said silently,

"But I'm different, I'm just a mercenary. Even if I'm to go overboard in my actions, it would be completely irrelevant to what England thinks, and won't represent England at all."

"Do you think I'll let you go alone?"

Knight Leader opened his lips.

“Even if you’re a mercenary, I can’t just leave it to you alone. With that damned luck of yours, you can’t possibly die, but from the Princess’ standpoint, how can I allow a nameless mercenary to protect her? Even if she’s only 14, she’s almost at a suitable age to marry. It’d be a country’s crisis if she was taken away by someone who’s possibly of ill reputation.”

“Are you listening to me?”

Acqua said impatiently.

He realized that all these objections that Knight Leader raised were just some flimsy made-up excuses.

And to Knight Leader himself, this was just nothing more than a joke.

Those two only exchanged looks, to the state where even their breathing was in sync.

They had such great chemistry.

“You’re saying that the Knights that support England can’t do anything in this situation?”

Knight Leader said, and then pulled out something like a pure gold medal from his chest. This was the proof of his bloodline; the patterns on the shield-shaped medal had his family crest. It was his identification medal. Knight Leader looked a bit lonely as he stared at the medal, and finally released his hand.

Without even looking at the identification medal that dropped onto the floor, Knight Leader gazed into Acqua’s eyes seriously.

“I’ll lose my right as a Knight, so let me go as well. The distress signal’s still being released, that means that the third princess is still alive.”

“I see, as expected of what you would do.”

William Orville knew of his determination, and revealed a slight smile.

Like Knight Leader, he knew all these. They were drinking partners, and they were extremely clear of what each other’s like.

And because they each understood, Acqua was a comrade that he could rely on to cover his back.

Knight Leader looked uneasy as he saw the flickering light, prompting William.

“Hurry up, even if we don’t do anything, the carriage’s defensive capabilities should be functional...since this is something that the Royal Family is taking part in directly, we can’t hope for the defenses to continue on. Got to get there fast.”

“You’re right.”

William wholeheartedly agreed, and the next moment, his fist slammed hard into Knight Leader’s abdomen. With a heavy sound, Knight Leader had a look of disbelief as he stared at William’s face.

“What...are you doing...?”

“Nope, I can’t let you go. You should understand that.”

William kept his fist back, and Knight Leader lost support as he fell onto the floor. Even so, Knight Leader, who had underwent rigorous training, didn’t lose consciousness completely. But William didn’t look at Knight Leader for even one bit, only saying,

“I used my identity as a mercenary to allow myself to move about freely on all the battlefields in the world, but I can’t enter the English Castle or Palace. Only you can do that.”

“Wil...liam...”

“If you really want to protect the third princess, you have to look ahead at the future, not just now. With such a ploy to fight for the throne, it seems like the same thing will happen to the third Princess again. At that time, it’s better to have someone accompany her. Protect her well, Knight Leader, not just the third Princess, but also the Royal Family who have become so corrupted. This is not something I can do as a mercenary, this is something that only you as a Knight can do.”

“WIIIIIIIIIIIAAAAMMMM OOORRRVVVIIIILLLEE!!!”

Abandoning Knight Leader who was shouting on the floor, William headed towards the battlefield.

Knight Leader once heard of a magic name.

It belonged to a mercenary.

Flere210.

“The time for me to proclaim my name has arrived, my name—‘The one who changes the reason of tears’!!”

Smack down in the middle of England and France,

Was William Orville, who could manipulate water spells, and was breaking past the country boundary.

CHAPTER 4

Who Is Protected by Whom?

Leader_is_All_Members.

Part 1

Misaka Mikoto was trudging through the late night town. In order to get a Gekota strap, she had gone through the trouble of taking a bath in a bathhouse in District 22, but as was typical, she had encountered a dangerous event involving a “no oxygen alert” or some such. After that ordeal, while taking a break inside the building, she realized that it was already late at night. She was feeling completely chilled and even the meaning behind taking the bath seemed to have disappeared.

“Aw, darnit... In the end I guess I’ll end up using the bath back at the dorm anyway,” she thought, but for some reason, the entrance to District 22 had been sealed.

Currently, the event surrounding the “no oxygen alert” seemed to have been settled and the seal on the entrances to the building itself had been lifted. It seemed that because of some system malfunction, the middle aged man in charge of the gate was frantically scratching his head.

Normally Mikoto would’ve voiced a complaint, but behind the middle aged man a loud sound of a large number of feet pacing impatiently back and forth could be heard, angry roars and reprimands flying past each other. The man’s complexion seemed to pale with each one. In this situation, making a complaint as a customer would be pitiful, Misaka thought, and gave up on grinding her teeth.

(Hum, I wonder what happened)

Looking at it like this, Mikoto was an owner of troublesome disposition evenly balanced by that of a certain boy. She wondered a bit about the fuss that had been at his side, however.

“Nyowah!?”

Suddenly with a crackle, something like static electricity flashed from the bangs on Mikoto’s forehead. It was somewhat rare for her ability to run wild, even to a slight degree.

Mikoto put on a civil smile and lowered her head before the startled middle aged man and retreated from there. This was a characteristic peculiar to Academy City perhaps, as not being able to control your own power by yourself was something that was unexpectedly embarrassing.

During this time, she got the urge to poke her head into some trouble. If she were, at this time, to meet a magician, they might suspect that this was “clearing out the people”, the effects of techniques that exerted influence over peoples’ senses affecting the techniques for controlling one’s own power.

(But what was that just earlier?)

Inclining her head, she decided that for now, there was nothing she could do to get to the surface until the gates started working. She looked at an information map of District 22, and decided to head over to a highly rated hotel in the 7th layer.

(I wonder if I can do a drop-in check-in at this hour... Even so, I’m worried about the dorm manager. I probably should call Kuroko and have her teleport me out of here.)

While thinking this, she descended the spiraling staircase into the 7th layer.

Suddenly, from the darkness ahead, someone’s figure appeared. The figure was clearly not walking normally. More than unusual, it looked shaky and suspicious. A degenerate? Mikoto narrowed her eyebrows, but as the figure appeared below a street light her face was stunned by surprise.

It was Kamijou Touma.

“Wai-, what’re you doing!?”

Mikoto hurriedly rushed up to him. Normally she wouldn’t show this reaction. She knew that this boy normally loitered around town during night, to Mikoto it was an undesirable but inseparable relationship. Even though they often butted heads and fought, worrying was rare.

However, Mikoto now faced a situation that forced them out of their normal behavior patterns. This was because Kamijou Touma was in an abnormal condition.

His face was pale as if he had been immersed in a sea of ice. The bandages wrapped all over his body had slid off due to moving too much. Some of them were even dyed red. The clothing he was wearing was also strange. It was not the student clothes she was used to seeing, but rather it looked like the surgical gown of a hospital patient.

“Misaka...?”

Kamijou said this as he barely kept his posture by leaning against the pillar of a street light. There were electrodes taped to his cheek and arm, the cords even being dragging

along the ground after him. Were they forcibly pulled loose? Looking at his eyes Mikoto's shock was renewed.

It wasn't noticeable unless you looked close, but Kamijou's pupils were dilated the wrong way. His eyes weren't focused. It was like he was gazing at scenery through foggy glass. From Kamijou's own expression, it looked as though he didn't realize it himself, or as if he couldn't afford to pay a trivial thing like that any mind as he braced himself.

“...”

Kamijou's lips moved a little, but Mikoto's ear couldn't pick up what he was saying. However, he separated himself from the street light with a slow movement and began walking again. He attempted to pass Mikoto by but at that moment his knees gave in. As he was about to fall to the ground, Mikoto frantically supported him.

“Idiot! You, what's up with those injuries!? Those electrode cords... don't tell me you ran away from some hospital!?”

“I have to... go.”

Because of their close distance she could finally hear Kamijou's voice.

“They are, probably, still fighting. That's why, I have to go...”

Just from hearing some fragmented words Mikoto could tell his entire body was shaking. She had a vague sense that this boy had been involved with countless incidents that she knew nothing of, but she had believed that these were something like extensions of brawls. In the past, once, he had defeated the strongest esper in Academy City, but she had thought that this would be a once-in-a-lifetime accomplishment. Who could have predicted that he would be on the brink of life and death like that countless times?

At the same time, if this was so, then there was something else Mikoto could accept.

(... Memory loss)

If he was always fighting battles that shaved off the edges of his life span like this, there was no way his body would come out unscathed every time. Was the cause of the memory loss a mental shock, or the result of a structural problem in the brain? Mikoto didn't know. However, whatever the reason for the memory loss, it came within the realm of plausibility. Kamijou Touma's body had been battered to that extent.

(I need to stop him), Mikoto thought. This boy was dragging his body that looked like it was dying, experiencing something enough to take his memories away, and still trying to face some unknown crisis.

“...?”

Kamijou looked perplexedly at his own arm that was being held fast by Mikoto. His face showed that he could not grasp why Mikoto didn't budge. It showed that he sincerely believed that nobody would help him or even raise their voice for him as long as he kept all things that could potentially worry others a secret.

This small thing angered her, from the bottom of her heart.

"Why... won't you say anything?"

Mikoto realized she had murmured that aloud. Knowing she could not take them back, she couldn't stop the words.

"I want you to help me,' or, 'Lend me your power...' No, not even something concrete like that. Just something simple like 'I'm afraid,' or 'I'm worried,' at least say something like that!"

"Misaka,... what're you say-..."

"I know."

Mikoto said it to cut off his attempts to even now keep on deceiving, no, to keep Mikoto from getting entangled.

"I know that you've lost your memories!"

At that instant, Kamijou's shoulders made a big movement. Big, as if he was seeing tremors that would decide his life. Seeing the bewildered Kamijou, Mikoto also felt a huge shock.

So what.

Mikoto had once in the past, really had her life saved by this boy. Not only her alone, but together with 10000 girls that she should protect, as well.

At that time, he had appeared before Mikoto who was trying, all alone, to take on the strongest Level 5 of Academy City.

He had appeared in a way that trampled all over Mikoto's heart, who had planned to burden everything on herself and die. His method certainly was a way of doing things that didn't have a shred of delicacy, a dirty method that even invaded her privacy. However, Misaka Mikoto and the Sisters had been saved that way. She wouldn't deny Kamijou Touma that one method. It would be fine should even this boy be saved by that way of doing things. That was why Mikoto said it.

"I know there's something big you're holding inside by yourself, but is that really something you need to carry by yourself? Getting beat up like this, even losing all the

memories inside your head, what reason is there that you need to keep fighting all by yourself?”

Kamijou listened to these words. The fact that he was keeping quiet encouraged Mikoto to press further.

“I too can fight”

As if challenging head on, slamming her will straight ahead. The things she couldn’t say until now, just naturally burst out from her mouth.

“I too can be of use to you!”

This wasn’t because she had the position as the third-ranked Level 5 of Academy City. It was not based on a small perspective like that. Even if she were to lose her power at this very instant and become just a Level 0, Mikoto could swear that she would tell him the exact same thing.

“There’s no reason for you to keep getting hurt by yourself! So tell me. Where are you going now, who are you trying to fight!? I will fight today. I’ll put you at ease.”

“Mi- saka...”

“The feelings people go through waiting for you, have a taste of it at least once! Lay down on the hospital bed and try knowing the feeling of a person who can’t do anything but watch from a safe distance! It was the same when you saved the Sisters. You told me to ask you for help, then you alone go to challenge Academy City’s strongest Level 5. Why don’t your own ideologies apply to yourself as well? Why are you the only one not asking for help!?”

While yelling, Mikoto gazed at Kamijou’s face. Somehow there was astonishment. However, that was not because something he didn’t know had been thrust before him. It was surprise that things he had been hiding had been exposed. This meant he still had his memories of Accelerator and the Sisters.

At this, Mikoto felt relieved, but on the other hand she was also disgusted at her own selfishness of mixing her feelings into this dire situation. In this state where she should be worrying about Kamijou’s wellbeing, she instead acted to wipe away her own anxieties.

Kamijou Touma didn’t notice, or if he did, he let it slide.

“A-anyway! Let’s go! To the hospital! Even if I tell it to you with words, you still won’t listen so I won’t let you go until we’re at the hospital!!”

Mikoto, while still holding Kamijou’s arm with one hand, pulled out her cell phone with her other and opened a map to start looking for the hospital.

“... I see”

Kamijou had been dumbfounded for a while, but eventually started to slowly move his lips. It could also be seen as a smile.

“You found out, eh?”

Even when he was about to collapse, Kamijou’s body housed a strange power. Mikoto judged it to be the most dangerous situation. That was why her hand wouldn’t let go of Kamijou’s arm.

“But you’re wrong,” Kamijou spoke as if seal to any further attempt of Mikoto to speak.

“Since I don’t have my memories, I don’t know the specifics.” Kamijou Touma’s core hadn’t been broken.

“I can’t remember my past self. I can no longer picture how I felt while facing that final moment. But when it comes to this stuff about ‘you’re getting beaten up’, ‘you fought until you lost your memories’, and ‘there is no reason for you alone to continue getting hurt’...”

His memory loss had been discovered. That in itself should have been an incredibly major event. However, the true core of Kamijou Touma did not lie in his memory loss.

“I doubt I put myself at such risk that I lost my memories so that I could say things like that.”

Mikoto’s facial expression stopped.

That conclusion was the real foundation that Kamijou Touma held. Because of that, the boy hid the fact of his memory loss. That someone was at fault, if he hadn’t moved it wouldn’t have come to this, saying something boring like that to keep someone from getting hurt.

A past that he could no longer recall.

“Though I can’t remember the events from before, even so, it is because of them I’m able to stand here. The ‘me’ from the past still motivates the ‘me’ that can’t remember anything today. What he left behind isn’t in the ‘head’, but in the ‘heart’. So, it doesn’t matter if I can’t remember, I still understand what I need to do.”

Kamijou Touma probably held a vague “something” that even he couldn’t grasp as a source of pride. Because of his beliefs, he didn’t have regrets. If he were to meet his past self, he would be able to say “Thank you,” with a smile and without hesitation. This boy believed this without doubt.

“Sorry Misaka. You hurry back.”

She realized her hand had let go. Kamijou Touma's arm moved with abnormally strong force.

"I'm going. It's not something I can entrust to others. It's not like there's a compulsion that I be the one to do it... Just, I'm going. In the end it doesn't change anything. If a cogwheel slides out of place and I lose my memories, it doesn't change what I should do. Kamijou Touma isn't the kind of person that lets something small like losing a bit of memories stop him."

The boy showed his back to Mikoto and began walking anew. If she had thought of following that unreliable walking figure, she surely could have done so.

(What do I do...)

However, Mikoto didn't move. His back was just there. If she reached out her hand it would reach.

(He didn't say I was wrong. I need to get him to a hospital right away. There's even the option that I go with him together to his battlefield... But, I know he isn't lying. Probably, in this situation, the fact that he's standing on his own legs has a special meaning to it.)

During this time, Kamijou moved.

During the time that Mikoto was worrying, Kamijou moved.

(But, something like that, I can't stop. Right now seeing him off has to be the right answer. Holding both hands, praying to God that he will come back in one piece is the most correct thing to do. All other options, whatever they are, are pointless. He definitely isn't wishing for anything like that...)

The unreliable back was getting further away. There was no time.

Even though she had to stop him, Mikoto didn't move.

(What do I do? I can't come to terms with it at all)

Probably, in all that Kamijou Touma said, there wasn't a single lie. He had simply let his true feelings be known. Even so, because he wanted to, he decided on fighting. If she needed a reason, it would be because that opinion needed to be respected. She understood that. Even an idiot would have to understand that.

But she couldn't accept it.

No matter what, she couldn't.

(.... I see.)



In an unknowing amount of time, she moved her hand to her own chest.

The girl called Misaka Mikoto had realized something.

It wasn't anything that had to do with reason or logic or dignity or appearances or shame or reputation, it was just a part of her very own heart, evidently the nucleus of the human Misaka Mikoto herself. The wretched, unsightly, selfish, unreasonable - and yet despite all this, honest and frank and "human".

The name of this feeling, Mikoto didn't know. What kind it was sorted under, she didn't realize yet. However, today, this day, this time, this moment, Misaka Mikoto knew.

Inside her slept an enormous feeling that could easily shake her being. A feeling that could easily destroy any control that one of the seven Level 5s of Academy City had over their inner selves as part of their Personal Reality.

Kamijou Touma's back disappeared in the darkness.

Misaka Mikoto couldn't stop him in the end.

The reason was not because her spirit had been beaten because of his actions.

It was because part of the emotion she had realized pressed against her chest in such a manner that she couldn't move a single finger.

Part 2

Acqua of the Back's mace was ringing.

It was not like it was some special ability nor some spiritual item, it was just purely human effort. The moment Kanzaki used this special spell called 'Yuisen', her power would momentarily increase. But against Acqua, she didn't know when she would reach her limit. With this, the difference between the two increased, and finally--she reached her limit.

An explosion.

As Kanzaki used her Shichiten Shichitou to receive the mace, her whole body was sent flying backwards.

"GGYYYYAAAAA!!!!?"

Having battled continuously, Kanzaki's body looked like it was about to crush the hill of rubble as it flew away for a hundred meters without bouncing back. Her body became a

cannonball as it destroyed every single hill of rubble and turned every single scrap of concrete into dust.

“Is this the end, Saint of the Far East?”

The feeling hidden within Acqua’s words was disappointment.

But after being buried inside the rubble, Kanzaki was unable to even move her body, let alone respond to him.

The strength she had now wasn’t even half of the amount that shot up her blood.

(...Is there anything...)

No such things as petty tricks or tactics.

How should she battle with that man when there was such a disparity in ‘power’?

(...What’s the real form of...that power...?)

Kanzaki spat out some blood as she wondered.

Having used all the power in this body of a Saint to use this spell called ‘Yuisen’, Kanzaki understood that a Saint’s attributes far exceeded what a human could do. ‘Yuisen’ had originally been created as a one-strike sword technique. If she didn’t do it like this, she may end up destroying her own body.

But Acqua broke through this impossible possibility front up.

Thus, he could pull the distance between himself and Kanzaki.

(—I don’t have...enough power to exert magic...on ‘Yuisen’.)

This spell wouldn’t just increase movement, it also prevented the muscles from exceeding what humans could endure and get destroyed, making sure that while the speed drastically increased, the entire body balance wouldn’t be lost. This was a ‘crystallization’ of all sorts of spells. If one wanted to go even further than that, or add in something else, the balance between all these spells would break down. Using the current pieces and piecing them together like a jigsaw puzzle, it was impossible to add a new piece in.

This was the limit of a Saint who mainly used close-ranged combat.

Maybe Acqua had some body defense spell that was even more refined than this.

Though Kanzaki thought of a few possibilities herself, no matter what, she failed.

As expected, there would be a problem if she powered up to his level. If she used a similar power to that of Acqua's. If anyone tried to use the power that Acqua used, at that moment, an ordinary person's body would have eroded, whether physically or magically.

(Acqua's...power is...)

Normally, the power given to a Saint couldn't be used entirely.

Since they were people who had similar body characteristics with the Son of God, Saints were those who were said to have inherited his power; even if it was just a part of it, in the end, it was not something that a human could grasp.

They had a part of that power, but trying to grasp a part of that part of power was already tough for a Saint.

This was the real identity of a Saint.

No matter how they built this up, there would be a divide that they couldn't surpass. If one had to describe it, it would be like finally getting hold of a power only for it to scatter like fog. Thus, there was a limit to using the power created through the Idol Theory with their own willpower.

However, this wasn't completely bad. If Saints could use such power at 100%, the high pressure would cause the Saint's body to self-destruct. This was more of a self-defense instinct than magic, since when they were babies, they controlled that power without knowing anything about magic.

However,

(...Acqua, he doesn't have the limit of being...a Saint...?...That power...has it already overcome what...a human can already control...?)

Needless to say, besides being a Saint, Acqua had the power of God's Right Seat. The reason for him to be called Acqua of the Back was because he had the element of the Archangel Power of God. Normally, one would think that it was just a natural addition of power, but in reality, this increased power doubled the burden on him.

Yes.

What was amazing was that Acqua had already controlled 200% of that power and still hadn't gone amok, his facial expression not changing at all.

(...That's impossible. This isn't something that can be excused through a word like 'quality' or 'genius'. These two incompatible elements of a Saint and God's Right Seat are both in the same body. This is already impossible on its own...)

This term called 'talent', it was a forceful yet acceptable one.

But this was different.

Since Kanzaki was within this level, she understood.

Talent, ability, these terms weren't such convenient things in reality.

(...Is there anything...)

Kanzaki heard a small sound.

It was the sound of Acqua of the Back standing in front of Kanzaki.

(...Saint, and God's Right Seat...)

Seeing this strong opponent in front of her, Kanzaki pondered.

(...Why must these two powers coexist in such a place...!)

"Ugh!!"

Before Acqua could step forward, Kanzaki, who was lying on the floor, rolled to the side.

And forcefully picked up the Shichiten Shichitou that was on the floor.

At the same time, Acqua swing the mace that was over 5 meters in length and delivered a huge strike as it appeared that he was taking out the rubble and the floor.

Originally used for a sudden strike, Kanzaki's sword could only turn attack into defense.

The mace and sword clashed with each other, letting out an intense metallic sound. Before the mace pressed down on her, Kanzaki looked like she was about to be blown away, but she stabbed her sword into the ground to reduce the impact. However, she fell about 10m behind before finally stopping.

"So are you going to fight on?" Acqua said, sounding impressed.

But this was of an attitude of looking down from above.

"What chances of making a comeback? It doesn't exist anymore. As long as you think about the number of special moves that you have and possibly can use, you can understand the outcome. If you want to pray, maybe a miracle will happen, but relying on those things isn't going to destroy such a rare breed of people called 'Saints'."

"...A rare number of them, huh?" Battered and tattered, Kanzaki muttered.

With a tone that was from deep within her heart.

“This isn’t a power gotten through your own effort, but forcefully through birth. You’ve had such a thing since birth, do you feel satisfied with that?”

“So what if you say that?”

Acqua had no intention of responding at all.

“I should have said it before. Among those mutters of beliefs, how many of them are real?”

Kanzaki and Acqua flew off at the same time.

Both of them clashed from the front, and sparks flew due to metal clashing.

“The reason you would be so angry is because of that, right? Having such an overwhelming difference in strength when compared to those Amakusa members who are only ordinary humans, they actually got involved in a battle between Saints. All because of this, right?”

“...!!”

“But this is the battlefield. Natural differences in ability, the attributes of the weapons in one’s hands, the number of fighters. The rules of the battlefield is to continue fighting head on even after knowing the differences in depth. If you’re complaining that you hate to get involved, then you shouldn’t be standing ‘here’ in the first place, and should have scrambled earlier.”

The situation between these two couldn’t even be called neck-to-neck.

Losing to Acqua’s pressure, Kanzaki’s body continued to fall back.

“Letting those without power fight; there’s no need for that no matter how you look at it.”

Seeing Kanzaki about to collapse, Acqua said, “Blades clashing with each other, it’s alright as long as it’s a soldier.”

This could be said to be one of Acqua’s beliefs.

In contrast to the other members of God’s Right Seat, this man had said before that he just wanted to crush the boy’s right hand.

Not an angel, but the Divine Mother--these were truly fragments of what a person with ‘Divine Mother’s Mercy’ thought.

To be honest, Kanzaki herself had thought of the same thing.

In such a cruel place called the battlefield, and no matter whether one was trained or not, a person's fighting prowess couldn't be measured. No matter how well armed a person was, anyone that wanted to die would die. If they hated this, they could only let Kanzaki, a Saint destroy all the risks and let them fight on a certainly safe battlefield. There was no other way.

Even if only considering the battle ability of both sides, there was still a threat from an ambush. But the real battlefield was different, there would be some nightmarish mishaps in perfect scenarios, and to grasp control of everything and prevent all these mishaps from happening was impossible.

Kanzaki blamed this on her own immaturity.

As her own power was insufficient, she couldn't control that ever-changing battle scenario, causing her important comrades to get hurt. She had thought this 'at that time', and as the Supreme Pontiff, she couldn't endure this fact and left the Amakusa.

However,

(This is...)

Kanzaki Kaori placed herself in Aqua of the Back's shoes and bit her teeth hard.

(Such an arrogant way of thinking.)

The Amakusa magicians died because they were too weak. If they all had power similar to that of a Saint, they wouldn't die. Was that true? Such a thing was impossible. Then what about that boy? That boy fought with everyone, won together with everyone, laughed together with everyone. What was he?

In the end, she wasn't able to say anything like fighting together. This wasn't because Kanzaki Kaori didn't trust the Amakusa-style Remix of Church's ability. It was neither character nor spirit, but ability. Because of that, Kanzaki was unable to entrust herself to anyone. This way, she wouldn't be bogged down by her companion nor be burdened by unnecessary losses.

Was the Amakusa-style Remix of Church really that weak?

Who was really the weak one?

Even if she barely managed to win in such a pitiful state, what could she get?

Even if things developed the way everyone hoped, even if the world moved in a positive direction, in the ultimate end, could she bring those people along when they didn't become her strength?

They would definitely be left behind.

In the surrounding atmosphere of smiles and laughter, only one person would be on the sidelines.

A Saint.

One that was born with abilities that no others had--continuing to use the special privilege of being 'a chosen person'. How foolish, how arrogant must she continue to be like this?

"I am truly...a big idiot."

Kanzaki Kaori said such words.

All the things that she had done till now were actually a subconscious form of violence.

In other words, things were like that.

Acqua of the Back, God's Right Seat, Kanzaki Kaori was like them.

'The Special One' managed everything, and the 'others' just needed to shut up and obey, this was for your own good, there was no need to do anything meaningless, don't use too many limited resources, everyone just needed to smile, no need to do anything else, just shut up and obey. Without knowing it, Kanzaki had made such a request to her comrades.

--"

Kanzaki rubbed her bloodied lips a bit and readied her Shichiten Shichitou.

What she should do.

(I've already understood.)

In the real sense, the one option she could choose to save her 'companions'.

The one option that could really recognize her 'companions' without a single one of them being lost in the spotlight.

(I understood it completely!)

The one definite enemy, the mistake that Acqua of the Back made, the one choice she should choose to correct this error.

The mystery in solving Acqua of the Back's power, the one way to resist that overwhelming power.

(I completely understood it!!)

Once a problem was solved, the remaining problems would unravel one by one. The Shichiten Shichitou in her hands let out a sound, and this was Kanzaki Kaori's last ounce of strength. She believed she was right, and would not regret using this power that she believed in.

The enemy was Acqua of the Back, who used the power of a Saint and God's Right Seat.

In the face of the strongest enemy ever, Kanzaki Kaori made her final move.

Part 3

As the two Saints battled it out 30m above the 5th level, at the volcanic crater-shaped opening on the 4th level, the Amakusa members were staring blankly at the battle. At this moment, they clearly heard a voice.

"...Give..."

It was the voice of a real Saint, one of only 20 in the world.

"...Please give me."

The voice of the original former Supreme Pontiff that led them.

"LEND ME POWER! LEND ME YOUR POWER!!"

Kanzaki Kaori's voice.

At first, Tatemiya, Itsuwa, and the rest, they didn't understand what she said. No matter how well their brains processed it, they couldn't believe that this was directed at them.

But truly, Kanzaki said these words to Tatemiya and the rest.

It was that Kanzaki Kaori who they thought they would never catch up to in their entire lives, it was that Kanzaki Kaori who they thought was different from them ever since she had been born, it was that Kanzaki Kaori who had said that she didn't want to hurt her companions and left them.

Right now, she was asking for help.

Now that she was facing an enemy she couldn't beat, she was asking for help.

"—AH"

At this moment, some people could feel their bodies trembling.

And some others felt tears welling up in their eyes.

This meant that Kanzaki Kaori's words and action were such a touching thing.

They were finally recognized by that Priestess.

They were no longer her baggage, but companions who were able to stand beside her and fight alongside her.

This had never happened before.

Why had things developed to such an extent that Kanzaki Kaori finally asked the Amakusa-style Remix of Church for help?

The reason was simple.

Even if it was Kanzaki Kaori, there were also enemies that she couldn't beat.

Even so, she had a reason to why she had to stand in front of that enemy.

Also,

The one hope left available for them to beat this tough enemy.

These extremely ordinary Amakusa members like Tatemiya and Itsuwa.

“ ... ”

At this moment, at this instant, nobody was willing to waste another second.

The people who were so weak that they had dropped their weapons picked up their weapons, one by one.

Nobody rejected her request.

All of them were bandaged up, and there were some with blood seeping through the bandages; some of them had their bandages broken, but all of this didn't matter anymore.

Even if each one of them and their comrades were facing an opponent they couldn't handle on their own, even if it was that 'monster' who caused that Kanzaki Kaori to get involved in such a hard battle, even if they were going to stand up in front of him again, nobody would be afraid. Their hearts were filled with delight, to be able to be the Supreme Pontiff's strength, to fight alongside that person again, the delight of such a thing caused them to forget about all their pain.

Some of them let out a battle cry of motivation, some of them shed tears as they looked like the happiest people on Earth, and some silently basked in this happiness. The people leaning on the walls finally used their own feet to stand up, their 'substitute' Supreme Pontiff Tatemiya Saiji finally feeling that the heavy responsibility on his shoulders was lifted as he sighed.

“...Let's go.”

As the substitute leader of the Amakusa-style Remix of Church, Tatemiya Saiji gave his last instructions.

But it seemed this wasn't enough, so he used all his feelings, and again,

“GO!! TO WHERE THE AMAKUSA SHOULD GO!!”

With that shout, the Amakusa members jumped in, one after another, towards the battlefield.

They knew how weak they were,

But even so, their reason for fighting didn't waver.

Thus, the Amakusa-style Remix of Church united to fight against this tough foe.

With that one leader they recognized, to fight alongside that woman.

Part 4

(What...?)

Acqua of the Back was unable to understand the rationality behind Kanzaki's action.

In a battle between Saints, anyone could guess the outcome when ordinary magicians were involved. And normally, Kanzaki hated this, this was the reason why she had brought Acqua of the Back away from the battlefield, and even prepared a special battlefield like this.

However,

“WOOOOHHH!!”

Some of them raised their swords and rushed over, some raised their spears high. The dead-looking people suddenly gathered around, forming a formation around a battered Kanzaki like they were protecting her.



To Acqua, this was just a wall made of candy.

He readied his mace and warned.

“And you asked the weak for help...are you willing to risk other people’s lives to save yours?”

“Do you really think so?”

Kanzaki Kaori gripped the Shichiten Shichitou with both of her bloodied hands as she said this.

A smile appeared on her face.

“Truly, as there were a lot of my comrades who got injured, I was afraid of such a thing, so I once thought of leaving the Amakusa-style Remix of Church.”

But at this point, Kanzaki paused forcefully.

“It wasn’t their weakness that triggered those tragedies.”

“...”

“It was me, who thought that they were ‘weak’, who didn’t believe in their abilities that caused these tragedies. Deep down, I looked down on them, not willing to leave my back to them. Just like that, I put aside a strength I should have, continuing to fight even though I was immature, and ending up revealing such a large hole in front of the enemy! Such arrogance, this prideful thought of ‘I’ll protect you all’, I WAS THE ONE WHO CAUSED ALL THESE!!”

She found her own weakness, but those who continued to move forward would get stronger and mature.

A new strength slowly seeped into Kanzaki Kaori’s battered body.

“Thus I overcame it. I believe in them, I want to leave my back to them, to utilize our ability to the maximum. I want to get back my Amakusa-style Church!! We’re all leaders of each other, everyone’s our friend!! THERE’S NO NEED FOR A HIGHER-UP LIKE A ‘SAINT’!!”

(What...?)

Truly, Kanzaki Kaori had now gotten back a power that she hadn’t believed in before.

That was her core.

The emotional core that those who absolutely believed in their own actions had, a strong core.

However, the fact that there wasn't much of a winning chance still remained. Even if she added 50 people, it was just a gathering of birds to Acqua, there was no problem at all. He had no need to use his full force to face the Amakusa. In the battle with Kanzaki, they would be blown away by whatever shockwaves like the background.

(So you're going to create a group psychology? That's just a misconception.)

"A baseless hope is just wishful thinking."

Strength filled up Acqua's body.

"DO YOU THINK SUCH A THING CAN SURPASS ME!!"

As if he was sweeping all the useless things aside, Acqua forcefully swung his mace. Kanzaki Kaori didn't look afraid at all as she dashed into the range of the mace.

The Shichiten Shichitou and the mace clash, but in order to reduce the impact, numerous Amakusa members immediately cast a defensive spell. No matter how much emotional support they had, the difference in strength between these two sides wouldn't change. But even so, even at this point, Kanzaki continued to clash with Acqua.

"As a Saint is born with similar body attributes as the Son of God, many people would follow the Idol Theory and accept a part of the Power of God."

According to the information, Kanzaki and the Amakusa should have been separated from each other for quite a few years.

But they didn't need to communicate verbally, just clearing this blank period instantly.

"But even if it's that kind of a 'Saint', that power can't be used indiscriminately like you. And yet you have power that exceeds even a normal Saint. Why is that?"

The clash between those two was just an illusion.

Acqua immediately counterattacked, and the formation that included Kanzaki and the Amakusa members immediately wavered.

Even so, the Amakusa-style Remix of Church continued to fight on.

"—The answer is simple, it's because of 'Divine Mother Worship'!!"

Yes, thinking about it carefully, Acqua didn't hide it at all. He had proclaimed it before.

He was one that used the power of the Divine Mother.

But Acqua of the Back should originally control the power of the Archangel Power of God. In contrast to the merciful Divine Mother, the Power of God was an existence that had blazed Sodom and Gomorrah down, and continued to remain active for the final judgment when the world would be destroyed; and there were even more legends of direct attacks. So why did he have to avoid using such 'an attack that was easy to understand', and go about in a roundabout way to use the Divine Mother's power?

"Your body attribute isn't just that of the Power of God, right? Besides the Power of God, a part of it is similar to the Divine Mother, so you could get the Divine Mother's power!!"

The Son of God and the Divine Mother had a mother and son relationship. It wouldn't be strange if they had similar characteristics between them.

Also, the Divine Mother wasn't just No 2 behind the Son of God in Christianity, even if she was placed in front of other Saints, she existed because she managed to bear the Son of God, so she did have a tremendous power. And there were many who praised the Divine Mother through the Divine Mother Worship, a Divine Mother who treated everyone equally mercifully, unlike the strict and just Son of God who ruled the world. This even gave the higher ups of the Roman Catholic Church a dangerous feeling that 'wouldn't the Divine Mother Worship become independent on its own?'

The Saint and the Divine Mother.

If there was anyone who had both of these attributes,

That person was Acqua of the Back.

Most likely, this was an ability he had been born with, and after becoming a member of God's Right Seat, his ability blossomed further.

How tremendous was the power bounded to his body?

"You had both of these existences overlapped within you when you were born. So just on the basic power of a Saint alone, I'll lose to you."

Normally, God's Right Seat members were different from humans. They were aimed at the position of The One Above God. So thus, they were not aimed at just being an ordinary Saint.

As Kanzaki herself was an ordinary Saint, it was hard for her to imagine that. But if some people had a 'certain power' that was higher than that of a Saint or an angel, maybe they had some element of being able to stabilize once they surpassed a limit, like a plane stabilizing after flying at a high velocity.

It was an existence that was even further than a Saint.

A high and stable limit.

Acqua had the elements of a Saint and the Divine Mother, so unlike the Saints who were stable when they ‘moved at low speed’, he continued to maintain a highly stable state. Thus, he could control the tremendous power that would otherwise have gotten out of control.

However,

“However, you do have a ‘weakness’.”

Kanzaki said.

Yes, in contrast to a slow flying plane, it was a lot riskier and difficult to fly a plane that was flying at several times the speed of sound, anyone could understand that.

“You have a downside that’s weaker than I, no, all the Saints in the world have when there’s a spell meant to take on a Saint!”

At this moment, Kanzaki paused.

Not facing Acqua, but at her companions.

In other words,

“—Saint Destroyer!!”

“...”

“No matter what attack, you deflected it with your mace or directly avoided it. It was only during that attack that you used a magical mean to do a real ‘defense’. In other words, that’s our chance of winning!!”

If it were an ordinary human, trying to master a Saint’s power completely was difficult. Trying to use both the powers of God’s Right Seat and a Saint was impossible, and this was what Kanzaki, an actual Saint, understood.

At first, Kanzaki had wondered if there was a special spell that could completely support these two things perfectly.

Though she hadn’t managed to find an answer, this was to be expected.

Because such a thing didn’t exist in the first place.

“The ‘Saint Destroyer’ was never tested before, and there weren’t any other practical examples. So Acqua, you couldn’t predict what would happen to you after you took that, right!!”

The reason why Acqua would defend against the ‘Saint Destroyer’ with all he had was because after taking the hit, he wouldn’t just lose some part of his power or be unable to use his power for several seconds.

“The ‘Saint Destroyer’ forcefully destroys anyone with a body similar to that of the Son of God, robbing the internal power and causing the Saint to be unable to move. Normally, you would return to normal after several seconds, but for you Acqua, who has both the attributes of a Saint and the Divine Mother, what the outcome will be obvious—ACQUA WILL SELF-DESTRUCT!!”

The spell he had cast used the delicate naturally-born-with attribute of a Saint being superior to a human.

In other words, this wasn’t something that could be done through human means.

Normally, a God-like technique would cause everything to destruct if the equilibrium was destroyed. Like an engine that could run up to 1000km/h, as there was such a powerful force, it needed delicate care. Thus, Acqua had used his full power to defend against it.

“ ... ”

Being seen through, Acqua didn’t say anything.

But his expression changed.

A smile.

This was different from the arrogant smile. He, who could be considered perfect, had only that particular weakness. And right now, that weakness had been spotted, yet this man called Acqua revealed a mighty smile.

The fact that his weakness had been spotted didn’t cause him to panic.

A battle wasn’t something like this.

Facing Acqua’s continuous attacks that were becoming even more vicious, Kanzaki barely managed to block them all with her Shichiten Shichitou before exhaling a bit. She adjusted her sword a bit, intending to use the impact of the shockwaves formed by the sword.

These impacts weren’t aimed at Acqua, but aimed at destroying the buildings behind him.

In the midst of the rubble, there was something buried within it. It was a rusted spiky metal wire.

(...I see, so that's your aim, huh...?)

The moment Acqua looked up, the numerous gold needles so happened to form a circle. After that, Kanzaki used her wires and Nanasen to give a definition of pain to the pile of rubble, as if she was carving something on it.

Finally, what appeared was a huge Cross, a sharp iron picket, and a crown of roses.

In other words,

“The symbols of the crucifixion of the Son of God!”

Since he had inherited a part of a Saint's power, he should have inherited the weaknesses as well. Even so, if this was enough to beat a Saint, nobody would need to work so hard.

Honestly, to an ordinary Saint like Kanzaki, it wouldn't have much effect on her.

However,

Acqua of the Back was a 'special Saint'.

Compared to the mere 20 Saints in the entire world, he had an even rarer attribute. He had both the power of a Saint and the Divine Mother at the same time. At the same time when he had this tremendous power, he had to balance these two powers. This was why Kanzaki Kaori would choose the symbol of 'execution'.

The 'execution' spell may seem unrelated to the Divine Mother, but in this situation, that was not so.

Yes,

For the Divine Mother was assumed as the largest point of suspicion in Christian History.

“—!!”

At this moment, Kanzaki sensed something that exceeded physical concepts floating up around Acqua.

This was a change that even a 'normal Saint' could sense.

In other words, Acqua, he,

“Is wavering.”

Kanzaki said with complete belief.

With Acqua at center, what existed were the powers of a Saint and the Divine Mother. Both of them were affected by the outside environment, and there was an intense fight inside his body, even letting out an ugly cry.

If it was now, they could do it.

Thus, Kanzaki Kaori shouted from deep within her heart.

The Lance of Longinus.

“ALL’S READY!! THOSE WIELDING THE SPEAR, NOW’S THE TIME FOR EXECUTION!”

“!!”

Wielding the key to the ‘Saint Destroyer’, on hearing Kanzaki’s words, Itsuwa immediately pulled out a wet handkerchief and wrapped it around her Friuli Spear and got into a ready position.

“...Interesting.”

But before that could happen, Acqua took action.

“The Amakusa-style Church, huh? This name is worthy of being carved on my chest!!”

At the same time he said this, Acqua jumped 20m up into the air-- no, he broke through the volcanic crater-like opening that connected the 4th and 5th levels, jumping up at least twice the height of the previous one. Though there were tens, hundreds of steel wires dancing about in the air, these couldn’t stop Acqua’s movements.

The volcanic crater-like hole let out a giant moon-like glow from the streets.

His back facing this artificial moon, Acqua readied his mace.

“--The Divine Mother shall remove all evil.”

A while back, that meteor-like destructive power had slammed onto the Earth and defeated Kanzaki in one hit, and even if Kanzaki was at her best condition, she wouldn’t be able to endure it. Besides, the jump this time was twice the height of the previous one, and the entire Amakusa definitely wouldn’t be able to take this hit. The entire 5th level may end up getting destroyed.

“Sometimes, depicting this power called the Truth of God, LET YOUR MERCY RISE TO THE HEAVENS!!”

A huge velocity, and a falling Acqua. The mace that was basking in moonlight dragged a bluish-white tail behind it.

(Is it over!?)

The defensive array was formed by numerous steel wires, and Kanzaki herself wanted to protect that pile of metal through magic. But this wasn't enough, this one hit from Acqua mercilessly aimed at the floor.

Having taken one hit from it, Kanzaki knew that if she took another of that hit, she would definitely die. And not only Kanzaki, it was likely that even the Amakusa members around her would be dead.

(The last grain of hope...!!)

Beside Kanzaki, who was clenching her teeth, Itsuwa raised her spear over her head. However, the spell 'Saint Destroyer' wouldn't be completed in time.

(Can't give up...)

Kanzaki Kaori reached out for the Shichiten Shichitou.

Having turned into the avatar of destruction, Acqua continued to fall. Looking up, Kanzaki glared at him as she stamped hard onto the plaza, pulled out the sword and placed it at a streamlined position.

This wasn't a stand meant for her to counterattack.

It was all to defend. Collecting all the symbols throughout history, forming this spell at the last second, turning Kanzaki Kaori into a shield.

(HOW CAN I GIVE UP LIKE THIS!!)

Acqua of the Back used all his strength to rush to the ground.

Light scattered all over the place.

Kanzaki Kaori's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, all her senses were slowly disappearing.

Part 5

Destruction.

Such a simple term, yet impossible to understand.

Her five senses were gone, what was left was only white. Maybe the sound of rubble blown away, or maybe the impact that blew everywhere, or maybe the dust flying about, or

maybe the smell of rust, or anything that got destroyed, none of them registered in her head. A real destruction, pure destruction, was it real at a level where ‘there was nothing’?

(...)

Seemed like her whitened senses would need some time to recover.

And Kanzaki knew.

Though it was bit by bit, she knew for sure that her senses were recovering.

The fact that she was not losing her senses but recovering them meant...

(What’s going, on...?)

The one attack that Acqua of the Back used should have caused absolute destruction. Including Kanzaki, all the Amakusa members shouldn’t be left alive. However, the situation now seemed like Acqua’s spell had gotten destroyed, like nothing got destroyed.

(Van, ish...? The spell, magic, vanished?)

Kanzaki slowly looked up.

No matter good or evil, strong or weak, this act erased them all.

She could only think of the one person able to do such a crazy thing.

“Im-, possible...”

Her senses were back.

Her words reached her ears; as if they had waited for this opportunity, all her senses returned to her. Even if she met a nightmare with Acqua’s attacks, what really happened was that ‘nothing happened’. It was the same scene as before, and the one person standing in the middle was,

Kamijou Touma.

Having taken Acqua’s magic attack directly from the front, the boy continued to stand there as he gripped the mace like he was about to crush it.

Truthfully, if the attack Acqua of the Back had used was just pure physical power, Kamijou’s right hand would have been crushed to dust already. But it was a magical attack, and no matter what kind of supernatural power it was, that boy’s right hand could eliminate all of it.

Acqua’s attack had been eliminated because most of it was magic.

The boy's right hand had neutralized that attack without any mercy.

“WHA...!!”

“----...”

Facing a shocked Acqua, the bloodied Kamijou spoke, but his words didn't reach Acqua's ears. After which, Kamijou slowly fell as if he had gotten hit by the mace, not because he had used up all his strength, but because he sealed up Acqua.

“Ugh!!”

Seeing this, Kanzaki took action.

With just Kamijou alone, it was likely that one sweep from Acqua's mace would have sent him flying. But the moment Acqua was shocked, Kanzaki used this opportunity, abandoned her Shichiten Shichitou and forcefully grabbed Acqua's giant mace and shoulder.

“YOU BASTARD!!”

Acqua seemed to shout something, but those two weren't listening.

Thoroughly battered, Kamijou and Kanzaki both looked at the same direction.

In other words, Itsuwa of the Amakusa-style Church.

They were looking at Itsuwa the ordinary magician.

“Leave the rest to me...”

Itsuwa used a handkerchief to wrap the handle of the spear, and the other Amakusa members got ready to prepare it.

“—I WILL DEFINITELY HIT HIM!!”

With this roar, Itsuwa exploded.

Her petite body surrounded by numerous spells, Itsuwa accelerated and rushed at Acqua.

Acqua tried to dodge her attack.

But his own power as a Saint was sealed by Kanzaki, who was also a Saint. Trying to shake her off and use a God's Right Seat's spell, he was negated by Kamijou's right hand.

“Oh.”

He couldn't move for a few seconds.

But with this, it was no problem.

“OOOOOOOOHHHHHHH!!!”

At this moment, Acqua let out a howl.

It was not because of fear.

He knew he couldn't avoid it, and yet, with an unwavering will, turned around and faced a charging Itsuwa. The moment he took that step forward, he let out a war cry to raise his battle spirit.

‘Saint Destroyer’.

Itsuwa's spear scattered, forming a lightning bolt. This spell that surpassed physical laws controlled the entire space and attacked Acqua.

The air and sounds of the vibrations exploded.

The lightning struck Acqua's abdomen, flying out from the back, and this time, it really pierced through his entire body.

As Acqua was hit directly, Kamijou and Kanzaki unconsciously let go.

Crosses of light appeared behind Acqua's back, different from the color of the fireworks, and extended out to both left and right before exploding. However, the middle point of these crosses looked like they pierced and intersected at some point, causing Acqua to fly back with the impact.

Having been hit by the ‘Saint Destroyer’, Acqua's body bounced off the concrete a few times, and the giant mace left his hands. Acqua ended up in the artificial lake on the 5th level. It seemed like he was a cannonball that was shot into the water as his body vanished completely inside the water, causing a new change at that moment.

The havoc of magic.

Acqua of the Back self-destructed.

The elements of the Saint and the Divine Mother reacted to the ‘Saint Destroyer’ attack, starting to fight each other and causing a chain reaction that the ‘Saint Destroyer’ shouldn't have been able to do within his body.

The lake in the darkness of the night was surrounded by something like a flash of daylight. Kamijou and the rest could only see white, and their ears could only hear the sound of a large amount of water being boiled, an uncomfortable sound.

The moment Kanzaki Kaori opened her eyes, Acqua didn't exist anymore.

However, the water in the artificial lake had boiled off, and the surroundings were a mess, as the pillars of steam that were as big as the surface area of the lake collided with the huge pillars and ceiling before scattering all over the place. It was like a huge 1000 year-old tree that was full of energy, showing how explosive Acqua's explosion had been.

Between the Lines 4

Ten years ago, on that manless barge.

William Orville's stroking the face that had been punched.

The one that punched him was Knight Leader.

In the middle of these two silent men, not knowing what to do, was the third princess of England, marked with the seal of inaptness. And because of that seal, there wasn't any problems even after she left the castle for so long.

"That was for tricking me and going off on your own."

Knight Leader cracked his knuckles and showed William a look that he wouldn't show to the social world as he walked to him.

"It's not over yet, I still haven't given you one for leaving England. So let me confirm this. I'm not mistaken, am I right? Are you really planning to leave England?"

"Yes, I want to get out."

The moment William made the response, Knight Leader's fist again sunk deep into William's face, sending him flying backwards. The intense sound of flesh clashing caused the third princess to be so scared that she let out a small whimper and covered her face with both hands.

However, the one who had been hit, William, didn't look bothered by it.

"...You, are you drunk?"

"If I were really drunk, I would have smashed you with a wine bottle."

Knight Leader put down the backpack he was carrying and rummaged through it, looking for something.

“Here’s a good bottle of whiskey from Scotland, there’s no drop of caramel inside, it’s a classic that’s brewed from the color of the whiskey barrel. Well, looks like I’ll just ignore it. You’re going off today, so let me beat you to death before that.”

“So what on earth were you angry about in the first place?”

William asked. At this moment, Knight Leader stopped what he was doing.

After a while, he said.

“You really can’t shake off the habit of being a mercenary.”

“Don’t you know what it means by being unable to climb further? Seems like you don’t.”

“I spent so much effort and finally managed to get you to join us as a Knight...yet you wasted that good intention. Are you planning to be like some great artist, to only get recognized several hundred years after your death? Do you really want such a life? Your actions aren’t any different from those kinds of people.”

“I don’t really know anything about art, and I know nothing about those artists’ lifestyles.”

“...So what’s your goal? Since you rejected my offer so adamantly, you must have some sort of reason.”

“Nothing really special.”

William Orville answered with a cold tone.

“I said it before, a Knight and a mercenary are different. Though the Knights in this country have great authority, there are still problems that they can’t solve. It’s the same for me as a mercenary. Though I have freedom, it’s really hard for me to get the trust of other people or organizations.”

“...You.”

“No matter which side it is, there are flaws everywhere. After today’s turmoil, you should understand. The larger an organization, the more things it can’t control, so there’s a need for someone to observe from outside an organization, and this person can’t be a special existence. Society’s like a machine made of many gears, everyone continues to affect each other, rotating in reverse. This fact can’t be forgotten.”

William was right. Knowing his character, Knight Leader remained silent. Seeing his old friend like this, William smiled.

“So why would the Royal Family be so willing to use such a forceful method to increase their territory? I’m mindful of the reason behind this. England’s a country made up of the Royal Family, the Knights of England and the Anglican Church. The Royal Family is very easily influenced by the Anglican Church, so please consider it some more.”

Hearing these words, the leader of the Anglican Church appeared in Knight Leader’s mind.

The Archbishop, Laura Stuart.

The one woman standing on the pinnacle, both Knight Leader and the Archbishop were standing at the same position. However, she continued to make Knight Leader uncomfortable. She was that kind of a woman.

William continued,

“The problem’s not just within England. The Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Academy City, their actions are getting unpredictable. The entire world’s stupidly moving along, and in this situation, this thing called an ‘organization’ will go out of control easily.”

“So you won’t consider being a member of the Knights of England and be a firm foundation for this country? Have you even thought of it?”

“Do you think that this can solve all the problems? Today’s case is the best example. I’ll choose to protect this country from the outside, so you’ll protect it from the inside. With this, our choices will be a lot wider. Even if one side goes out of control, the other side can stop him.”

“Looks like it’s pointless to continue talking like this.”

Knight Leader looked lonely as he said. As if he wanted to chase this loneliness away, he passed the bottle of Scottish whiskey to William.

“This is a farewell gift. Lord Chamberlain said this is his prized work this year.”

“...Such a high-class. Isn’t it a pity for me to drink it alone?”

“Then find some companions on the way and share this with them.”

Seeing Knight Leader look like he was squabbling, William could only sigh. No matter where they went, these two people’s status as a Knight and a mercenary wouldn’t change. William thought it was really amazing that they could be that close for so long.

“Oh yes, I should have a heraldry that’s being made by a craftsman outside London. Help me cancel the order. If it remains, the obsession will remain as well.”

Those were the final parting words that the mercenary said.

No special action or ritual; if Knight Leader looked like an aristocrat that had territory, William looked like an unrestrained mercenary.

After the mercenary left, Knight Leader muttered to himself.

“...How could you leave it behind.”

The third princess stared at Knight Leader’s face, but it seemed that Knight Leader himself didn’t realize that he let out a voice.

“...How could you throw it away like that, you scoundrel.”

EPILOGUE

The Guide to Even More Mayhem.

True_Target_is.....

Kamijou Touma woke up in a hospital bed.

He was in the familiar hospital room he was so acquainted with, and it seemed like he had been moved to the 7th District hospital where that frog-faced doctor worked. Maybe it was because he kept getting involved in all sorts of situations, but every time he was sent specifically to this hospital room, Kamijou kept wondering whether he was becoming a bother. It made him feel embarrassed.

“Ah, you’re awake?”

The voice belonged to Itsuwa, who was sitting in the visitor’s chair. Kamijou wanted to sit up, but his body failed to move as he commanded. It wasn’t just because he was severely injured: There was an abnormal sense of fatigue, as he could not call upon any strength at all. It was like his entire body was held down by the fatigue accumulated onto him.

While Kamijou felt bothered by such an uncomfortable feeling, the person beside him felt relieved and relaxed her shoulders before saying, “No, it’s normal for you to be so unable to move. You left the hospital on your own when you needed to rest, and you managed to blindside Acqua.”

From Itsuwa’s words, Kamijou knew Acqua had at least retreated. No matter whether they were civilian or Amakusa, there had been no deaths on either side. However, there was no sense of realism on Kamijou’s side.

Truthfully, Kamijou did not remember much after he left the hospital. For some reason he thought he had met Mikoto along the way, but that seemed more like a dream than reality. Speaking of which, Kamijou had intended to hide his memory loss the moment he woke up. Even when he thought things like “*I don’t remember that*” or “*What did I forget?*”, he let it pass with an ambiguous smile.

“... But that... that was amazing! That Acqua guy, he’s a member of God’s Right Seat *and* a Saint, and we managed to beat him... what can I say? Isn’t this some sort of historic moment or something?”

“Wha-what is the one who contributed the most saying?! And the fact that we beat that guy can be considered an accomplishment too. And we didn’t even suffer a single casualty! Isn’t this like Santa doing a somersault and dropping presents like he’s bleeding...”

For some reason, Itsuwa blushed tremendously as she put her hands on her huge chest. It seemed defeating Acqua was not merely finishing a mission. Since the magic side was not very familiar with Kamijou, it was the only conclusion they could make.

It should be noted the key that dealt the finishing blow was Itsuwa’s Saint Destroyer; however it seemed Itsuwa herself did not realize that fact. Maybe because she was a natural airhead or maybe because she was simply trying to be humble, but that was a crime. From the perspective of Acqua of the Back, it was not something that could be passed off so easily.

“Ah... speaking of which, what’s today’s date? Is... is my attendance alright?! Damn it, it looks like I’ve got to confirm this quite a bit! Why am I getting involved in all sorts of situations?!”

“Ah... no... you can’t... you can’t get out of the bed now!”

Kamijou tried to sit up, only for Itsuwa to force him back down by pushing down on his shoulders with her hands. The result was that both their faces ended up five centimeters apart. Shocked, Itsuwa’s blushing face showed itself to Kamijou, and Kamijou felt there was a wall of air between them. Even so, the option of pulling away never presented itself to his mind.

At that moment, “Touma’s still Touma.”

Looking towards the origin of the voice, they saw Index standing there with a blank look, rooted to the spot. Despite her perfectly calm expression, a broken vase was on the ground next to her.

With a God-given premonition that something very bad was about to happen very soon, Kamijou said nervously, “Ah, wah?! Hold on, Index! I know you can’t say anything due to shock! Aren’t you completely giving up on this existence called Mr. Kamijou and other humans?!”

“... Up until a few minutes ago, I was the one sitting in this room. It didn’t become like this until the moment I left... speaking of which, why haven’t you apologized to me yet for leaving the hospital on your own?”

“Ah... ye-yeah! I agree with that! You ran rushed over to where Acqua was despite your injuries! That was too rash of you! What would have happened if something bad happened to you?!”

“Acqua?! You’re talking about Acqua of God’s Right Seat, aren’t you?! You faced such a powerful foe without asking for my help?! What’s going on Touma?!!!”

“Eeeehhhhhh?! Oi, Itsuwa, since when are you on her side?! Is this the Amakusa’s strength in switching sides?!”



In the long corridors of the hospital, Kanzaki Kaori stood outside the room where a conversation was underway. She too had come to visit a certain patient, but it seemed she had completely missed her chance to make an entrance (it could be said Itsuwa was a step ahead of her), and now she was flustered about what to do next.

... What should I do? According to the schedule, I have to return to London by tomorrow. This is the only chance I’ll have, but who would have thought Itsuwa and ‘that child’ would be here?

“Nee-chin... if you keep being so indecisive, what little time you have left is going to run out, y’know?”

This sudden voice came from directly behind her, causing Kanzaki to jerk on instinct. Turning around, she saw the speaker was the blond-haired, sunglasses-wearing Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

Tsuchimikado gently raised his hand to the side of his mouth and spoke with a bemused smile, “Finally, after so much effort, you’ve managed to find time in your busy schedule to come to Japan, yet because of Index and that Amakusa girl you’re unable to utter even a word of thanks?”

“I-I understand that! But... how do I put it... even considering a private conversation has me extremely embarrassed. With Itsuwa and ‘that child’ present it’s... I’ll just wait a bit longer...”

“Then that fallen angel costume... did you remember to bring it along?”

“Wh–what? Wh–why would I bring such a thing?! That sort of thing is even harder to get through customs than my Shichiten Shichitou!! And even if I were to go through with such a stupid plan and wear it, it would only be in a 1-on-1 situation! I would never go in looking like that when Itsuwa and ‘that child’ are present! Don’t you understand how terrifying a power the photographic memory of ‘that child’ is?!”

Such a situation made one terrified just thinking about it.

Kanzaki shook her head vigorously, trying to remove such thoughts from her mind, but it seemed Tsuchimikado anticipated such a response and nodded his head wisely, “For this determined yet shy Nee-chin... hmph!! Today I prepared an improved ‘erotic fallen angel costume’!”

“Tell me what part of this costume was ‘improved’?!”

“Eh? What are you talking about? Look: The amount of cleavage exposed here, and the transparency of the skirt here, and...”

With all the strength her arms possessed, Kanzaki pinned Tsuchimikado’s together, just before he could stretch out the costume to better display it to her. Despite being gripped by the strength of a Saint, Tsuchimikado had a smile on his face.

“Then what is your plan? Nee-chin, you better explain what you’re going to do quickly. Are you going to rely solely on a normal smile and that slightly flushed face of yours to express your thanks? Think this through, foolish Nee-chin! The situation has already progressed to the point that retreat is no longer an option! Don’t think you’ll be forgiven for such simple tactics!”

Even though Tsuchimikado was wearing sunglasses, the light in his eyes still shone through. The calm, cool, and collected Kanzaki evaporated before his stare.

Kanzaki took a step back, talking frantically, “Then what do you suggest I do? Even if it means I owe you even more, as long as it’s within my power to do so I shall put all my effort into it!”

“Rubbing while you’re holding it. You should be able to do that right?”

“Ho-hold what?”

“You innocent idiot! Okay, let me ask you this: Nee-chin, what do they exist for? Those characteristics unique to mammals — that is to say, those breasts of yours — what do they exist for? Tell me!”

“A—At the very least, they are not for rubbing and holding objects between them!”

The things Tsuchimikado was trying to tell Kanzaki made no sense to her, and she wore a confused expression. Faced with an innocent Kanzaki who could not understand the true meaning of his words, Tsuchimikado was at a loss.

“But really, Nee-chin, is it okay for you to walk in so carefree?”

“Wha—what?”

“... That girl, if it’s that Itsuwa girl, she would have worn the erotic fallen angel costume without a second thought!”

“Th—that sort of outfit?? She wouldn’t dare...!!!”

The two engaged in meaningless whispers.

With a devilish smile on his face, Tsuchimikado said, “How can you be so sure? Itsuwa isn’t as mature as you, but as a result she can do such an outrageous thing. Even though that ‘wet napkin plan’ of hers failed multiple times, you can tell she’s putting a lot of effort into winning Kami-yan’s heart. The Itsuwa who failed several times, if she was able to obtain something that would improve on what she is lacking, something that would give her an advantage — that is to say, something like this erotic fallen angel costume... in that instant, I wonder how high her ‘attack power’ would become?”

“Tha—that’s impossible! This sort of situation would never befall someone belonging to my Amakusa!”

“Now that I think about it, holding and rubbing it wouldn’t be a problem for Itsuwa with measurements like hers...”

“As I said before: ‘What exactly are we supposed to be holding?!’”

Faced with Kanzaki’s innocence, Tsuchimikado was unable reply, and it was beginning to give him a headache. It seemed a change in tactics was required.

“In the end, I see Nee-chin is *that* type of person... fleeing because she’s too embarrassed... have you no gratitude at all for Kami-yan?”

“It’s not like that! It’s just that all this talk of ‘erotic fallen angel costumes’ is going way too far! I just want to use normal methods to thank him!”

“Itsuwa wouldn’t mind though, would she? That’s because the gratitude she has towards Kami-yan is stronger than yours. To tell you the truth, even with just the ‘normal’ fallen angel costume, Itsuwa’s attack level would rise quite a bit. And if she wears the improved ‘erotic’ fallen angel costume... do you know what this new gap would mean?”

“Wha—what... what would it mean?”

“It means, Nee-chin, you have lost to Itsuwa as a woman.”

“Eh?!”

“Sigh, I wonder if the Amakusa are really okay... This woman, she only has high self-esteem; she doesn’t have any idea about the meaning of ‘lowering one’s self’. With that type of person, how are they supposed to guide the lost lambs? Nee-chin, could it be that the moment you’re faced with a challenge, you think only of yourself and leave everyone else behind?”

“Th—this harsh language, just for an erotic fallen angel costume... is it really necessary to go so far?”

Even though she was certain of her position, Tsuchimikado's words caused Kanzaki's heart to begin to falter. She didn't know if it was because of any feelings she had towards Kamijou but, before long, Kanzaki's mind was utterly disoriented.

N-No! This is all part of Tsuchimikado's plan! 'Erotic fallen angel costume'! How could that sort of object be used to judge a woman?! Wait, that isn't the point! It's not a question of being a woman, it's what method I should use to express my thanks... but even if I don't use the erotic fallen angel costume... I cannot think of any other methods at all! Aah! I cannot be so weak! I...! This is Tsuchimikado's trap! No, but... calm down! I have to calm down so can I think this through!

“Hm? Nee-chin?”

Seeing Kanzaki so absorbed in her own thoughts, Tsuchimikado was a bit worried.

Regardless of whether or not she heard Tsuchimikado, Kanzaki's multiple facial expressions slowly disappeared, to be replaced by an expression of serenity as Kanzaki sat down in the corridor. With exaggeratedly slow movements, Kanzaki, seemingly from nowhere, took out twenty or so tiles and raised them.

“GNRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!”

From above the center of the tiles, Kanzaki's fist came crashing down. It was not a question of whether the tiles were intact anymore, as Kanzaki's fist was buried in the floor.

As the sound of breaking tiles echoed along the corridor, Kanzaki spoke to Tsuchimikado in an exceedingly cold voice, “It's alright; I've thought it through.”

On the other hand, Tsuchimikado, faced with the erratic behavior of the woman before him, could not help but feel a bit uneasy.

Crap, I was only teasing her, but maybe I went a little overboard?

As sweat trickled down Tsuchimikado's face, Kanzaki slowly straightened out her hand, her fingers straight as a pencil, as if she was about to perform a Karate chop. The overall feeling was as if Kanzaki was preparing to crush Tsuchimikado's skull with her bare hand.

“Tsuchimikado?”

“Y—Yes?”

“I am prepared. Give it to me.”

Ten minutes later, after punching the devilishly grinning Tsuchimikado in the face, taking a huge step forward as a woman and leveling up in an entirely different manner than she had intended, the Priestess of the Amakusa Church, Kanzaki Kaori, stormed into a certain room in the hospital.

Afterwards, to preserve the reputation of the female Pope, it did not matter what happened to the world, even if the world was thrown into chaos. One thing was certain: Kamijou Touma, regarding that third angelic shadow that differed from Misha Kreutzev and Kazakiri Hyouka, would most certainly feel nothing but fear upon seeing it from today onward.



A contact with the Anglican Church.

With several documents in front of them, the war negotiator and his contact were discussing several different options for a surrender plan.

Implicitly, they were selecting the most desired outcomes for themselves. Before he had listened for even half a minute, the Pope cut the communication.

“Curses!”

He was furious. Acqua of the Back’s defeat had two major implications: For one, it was a major blow to their fighting strength, and for another the enemy had assumed superior fighting strength for themselves.

How could Acqua have been defeated in the first place?

Kamijou Touma.

The owner of a wholly unique power. It did not seem like he was the direct cause of Acqua’s downfall. Many people had spontaneously gathered around him for the sole purpose of protecting him. Simply put, this circle of protective friends was his greatest strength, not Imagine Breaker itself.

“...” The Pope thought quietly. Certainly, that boy was a dangerous opponent.

As he was submersed in thought with a serious expression on his face, the sound of echoing footsteps reached his ears.

“Were you hoping for Acqua’s defeat? That boy has grown fairly well. Well, as a result any end to a just cause for criticism can no longer be concluded. Ha... the great Roman Catholic Church erasing all traces of it stirring up trouble in the world... anyone who was a culprit being swiftly eliminated.”

The footsteps reverberated throughout Basilica di San Pietro in Vatican City. Upon seeing the cause, a mortified expression surfaced on the Pope's face.

"Fiamma of the Right... don't tell me... you have come out of the Interior..."

"Such a grim look on your face." The person who spoke to the Pope was but a solitary young man.

Fiamma of the Right regarded the Pope's dejected face, "A leader's nature is such that he is able to speak openly in the midst of crisis. Your response has been unsatisfactory in that sense; your caliber as a leader can thus be judged entirely from this."

"What are you going to do?" The Pope cautiously inquired.

Vento of the Front was in the midst of recuperation, Terra of the Left was dead, and it was still unknown whether Acqua of the Back was dead or alive. Should the circumstances require it, given the current decimated state of God's Right Seat, the Pope would be able to wrest authority from Fiamma in one fell stroke. In the past, Fiamma of the Right had been the annoying existence at the center of God's Right Seat, to the extent that even amidst the exceedingly powerful figures of God's Right Seat, final authority rested solely with Fiamma.

The Pope's tone was dark, "Vento's surprise attack on Academy City. Terra's large-scale operation with which he revealed himself to the world. Even Acqua's crushing power... all have ended in failure. What will you do now? For the cessation of activities by the headquarters of the science Side, a plan to crush Academy City is needed."

Certainly, he acknowledged Academy City's prominence; to that point he depended on the instruction of God's Right Seat for guidance. That was why, if he was alone, even if he were to involve his followers, he could not muster a siege that was anywhere near enough.

Contrary to the Pope's expectations, Fiamma's reply was lighthearted, "First, we must bring England to its knees."

What?

Ignoring the Pope's doubts, Fiamma continued, "Presently, as a result of continuing our key alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church, all of Europe with the exception of England is within our grasp. With the force of many nations behind us, we can starve England into mediocrity. Manpower, materials, finances... the flow and supply of all of them can be cut off. They are the foundation of an island nation. Completely isolated and unable to flee, their power will slowly but surely diminish as the months go by."

The Pope had no comprehension of the intent behind Fiamma's words, so he gave up trying.

Instead, he asked directly, "I don't understand the significance of this."

“Doesn’t a pipeline run between Academy City and England? Were England to come under attack, it would deal a severe blow to Academy City, I believe. Given what incredible potential as a hostage England possesses, Academy City would become unable to continue the war beneath their infuriatingly calm facade. ‘For the sake of helping our ally’ becomes the pretext.”

“Conversely, if the attack were to fall on Academy City first, England’s actions would be halted. The Anglican Church is one of the three primary denominations of Christianity. The impact of that fact is significant. Going to war against Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy, the other two of the three great denominations, would be unthinkable. With England’s rise in strength and Academy City - the entirety of the science side - its main ally having been reduced to impotence, England could walk away without a scratch.”

“That is not it. That is not it at all, your Holiness,” Fiamma interrupted. “Academy City is not my target.”

Hearing that, the Pope stopped breathing. He could not seem to fully grasp what Fiamma of the Right was trying to tell him.

Fiamma merely continued on, “‘That’ is in England. We must acquire ‘That’ at all costs. Our compatriots there have meekly offered ‘That’ up to us, I feel. In order to gain possession of ‘That’, a major uproar is required. The Roman Catholic Church must increase its application of colossal force in its operations.”

“What are you saying?”

“Hm? I do not wish to answer that. These actions are not entirely out of line with your wishes: With ‘That’ in hand, Academy City, and maybe even the whole of the science side, will be utterly shattered.”

The Pope, who still had no idea what Fiamma was planning, asked, “What... what is ‘That’?”

“Ah...” Fiamma simply opened his mouth. The words he spoke were:

... ..

... ..

Gatan!

A sound echoed throughout their surroundings.

It was the sound of the great columns of Basilica di San Pietro colliding into one another at the back of the staggering Pope.

“You fool...,” the Pope barely managed to gasp, “Are you really of Christianity?”

Fiamma's reply was casual, "Why ask when you already know?"

"Curse you!"

"It was enough that the Pope has been my temporary friend and ally. It has been most effective for my purposes."

Fiamma's words were mocking, but the Pope completely ignored them. He had no time to think about Fiamma's tone of voice.

Vento of the Front, Terra of the Left, Acqua of the Back. Each had their own unique thoughts and philosophies. Despite their differences, they continued to act as members of the group known as God's Right Seat. Obtaining the power of the Archangels themselves, becoming *La Persona Superiore a Dio*, and saving humanity directly. Though exceedingly arrogant at its base and in direct defiance to God, one could understand such thinking when looking at it from a human perspective.

The person in front of him was different.

Fiamma of the Right was decisively different from the other members of God's Right Seat.

He said he wanted to isolate Britain through the combined might of the Roman Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Church. No matter what anyone said, however, it was obvious Britain would never remain silent. If they were to force Britain into such situation, Britain would most certainly resist with all of its power. Were that to happen, the whole of Europe would become a battlefield. It would no longer be a simple matter of sending one or two people into Academy City -- it would be an all out war.

"You bastard... do you really think I'll allow you to do that?"

He most certainly would not. The Pope had finally realized a war that must never be started was about to begin... but he could still prevent it if he acted **now**.

"What do you intend to do?" Upon seeing the Pope's face, Fiamma slowly shook his head, "What can you alone do against Fiamma of the Right, leader of God's Right Seat?"

"You no longer have any influence."

"Do you really believe so? Even accepting that God's Right Seat consists solely of people in possession of unique attributes, they are, in the end, merely people. The positions of Front, Left, and Back can be replaced at any time so long as I still live."

"I won't give you the chance to do that." The Pope's tone was dark, "Be silent now, Fiamma of the Right... and perhaps forever."

BOOM!!!

An explosion was heard. It was not that anything special occurred, but that nothing changed. The surrounding space suddenly began to tremble with a strange noise, like being inside a large container and watching the box implode due to an external force.

“All the Apostles, from the First to the Twelve who believe in the same God, Thou shall overflow me with strength, thou shall understand the intent of Man, and thou shall plead for power to crush the enemy.”

Numerous lights danced about in the air. They were merely orbs of light, but there seemed to be inverted crosses or seashells inside them which gave a completely different image. These lights of unique significance surrounded Fiamma, and flat surfaces formed between them like patterns on a soccer ball, sealing his body tightly.

At this moment, a whistle could be heard coming from Fiamma, who was completely surrounded. It was his voice.

“So you used the symbol of the Son of God and the Twelve Apostles? Impressive. However, how can the Pope employ the sign of the traitor Judas?”

“Don’t be mistaken. It’s true Judas betrayed God by betraying His Son, but the one thing which called Judas to be an Apostle was God’s mercy, understanding, and love. It’s easy to bury someone you hate, but God’s true intention is to guide humanity against this impulse.”

An explosion resounded through the structure.

A restraining spell created a thirteen-sided object around Fiamma, not only restraining Fiamma’s actions physically but also separating his flesh from his soul. He was trapped in a “woundless bind”; nothing more than a hollow existence.

“After Judas’ betrayal, he hung himself due to the immense guilt he felt. His feelings were the darkest, coldest, deepest, and most painful ever felt; no matter where he looked, he could see no sign of hope. Remember this is what you’re going to experience forever.”

Fiamma could hear nothing, but the Pope’s mouth was still moving.

“From this moment forth, you shall be bound for forty years. Sample the ‘loneliness created by oneself’ that Judas experienced, and correct that immature soul of yours.”

Inside the thirteen-sided object, standing in stupor, Fiamma’s lips give a slight twitch. The sign of final resistance he was making with all his strength.

“Give up. I am the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. The power I wield now is the Holy power of two billion followers passed down through two thousand years of history. It is not something that can be destroyed by just one person.”

In addition to this, the Basilica di San Pietro was the largest and highest stronghold of the old power. Combined with the power of the Vatican, these things could be said to be powerful spiritual items that could increase the Pope's strength.

At that moment Fiamma's voice was heard, "Hmph."

The Pope expression twisted into one of shock. This was not something someone who had been bound by such a spell should be capable of.

Fiamma's voice adopted a light tone, "How pitiful... *just* two billion followers? *Only* two thousand years of history?"

The world disappeared.

The Pope barely managed to see the thing which appeared on Fiamma's right shoulder, alongside a bright light from his eyes, because the very next moment his vision was engulfed by empty whiteness and a violent storm destroyed his surroundings. Like an unstoppable tornado the storm exploded outwards, destroying one-third of St. Peter's Basilica from the inside-out.

The magic arrays supporting the colossal structure were cut off one by one, and the other related facilities protecting Vatican City became damaged one after another. The defensive arrays meant to protect the land were heavily damaged, and the large amounts of magic congregated there lost all sense of purpose, creating chaos and causing the surrounding scene to be distorted.

The Pope's body was sent flying over one-hundred meters away, before finally landing onto the stone floor of the parade.

He stared at the half-destroyed Basilica di San Pietro with a shocked expression. The greatest and most important stronghold in the world; the largest, most grand church of Christianity in the world had been torn apart like it was made of wet paper. The overly pitiful scene he was witnessing caused the Pope to ignore the pain he should have felt from his wounds.

At the center of Armageddon stood Fiamma of the Right, calmly walking towards the plaza. There was a strange thing above his right shoulder. Different from the two arms he possessed as a human, like a wing that hadn't developed properly, it was a huge, malformed hand with four fingers on it, composed of blocks of distorted light. It was told in Greek legend Athena had hacked her way out of the forehead of the King of the Gods, Zeus, and climbed out of the wound. The scene in front of the Pope was similar to that legend: Both were entirely unbelievable.

"How dull. It was destroyed that easily?"

Fiamma looked at his right hand and the thing growing out of his shoulder as if he were checking a car's engine, and then clicked his tongue in annoyance.

The Pope leaned against a stone fragment, and said with a groan, “That... arm... don’t tell me... that power is...”

“That is correct. You could say my Right Hand has the power to create... miracles.”

Fiamma slowly moved through the rubble, “The Son of God used His Right Hand to cure the illnesses of the sick and revive the deceased. It was the Right Hand which drew the Cross and scattered the holy water used for the Baptism of Christ. Furthermore, the Right Hand of Archangel Michael has the distinction of being the greatest weapon in history, having cast down an uncountable number of Fallen Angels; even Lucifer was defeated when opposed by the Right Hand of Archangel Michael. It is such an overwhelming power.”

The embodiment of the power of the Right Hand itself. The Holy Right.

The red man who embodied fire continued his explanation to the man said to be the greatest in the Roman Catholic Church, “However, the Holy Right possesses such immeasurable power it is not something a mere human can control. The holy water an ordinary follower scatters or the Cross they draw with their hand... they possess but a mere shadow of the power the legendary acts they are imitating possessed. Nothing more. Even if performed by a Saint or member of God’s Right Seat, all are still of the human body. Understand this, Pope of the Roman Catholic Church: I am still, in the end, merely human. Such a troublesome existence.”

The man in possession of power far exceeding any “mere human” could yet look down and call himself human.

Fiamma spoke to the Pope with a bored tone, “To summarize, I possess the ‘Miracle of the Right Hand’, but am unable to utilize its full potential. Even with such power, its feats are infantile when compared to their originators. Like recording a modern television program with a black and white television set.”

The huge hand emitted an unknowable presence as it swayed behind Fiamma. He licked one of his slender fingers and said, “Was this not what you wanted?”

The great cathedral built by humans, the mystic stronghold built piece by piece without pretense, St. Peter’s Basilica had been destroyed by Fiamma of the Right.

“The Right Hand which creates all miracles will destroy all evil. The power of the Right sent the Lord of Devils into Hell and ensured there he would be bound for one-thousand years. If I can completely master the Holy Right... are you not curious as to what is inside it?”

“Don’t tell me...”

If he was referring to what was in the report, the Pope had read it before. The undefined, abnormal power a certain boy from Academy City possessed. The Right Hand that would destroy all miracles it touched. Imagine Breaker.

“If it’s me, it can be mastered.” Fiamma laughed and moved his right hand horizontal to himself. As if responding to his command, the third arm splitting the air moved as well, mimicking Fiamma’s actions. “If it’s The Likeness of God, it can be mastered. Preparations are needed, however.”

Of course, even if he were to gather all the ‘materials’, he still would not be able to create the spell needed. What was required to properly control such limitless power far exceeded all human limits and knowledge. The Pope knew of only one treasure trove of knowledge that had gathered every magical book on the planet, a certain crystallization of knowledge.

Fiamma most likely managed to guess from the Pope’s expression the thoughts running through his mind, and his smile became radiant, “The Index. The people of England have prepared such a nice gift for me.”

So that was it. That was why he wanted to attack Britain: His aim was not to search for the person herself, but to draw her back to Britain.

“How can I... let you get away?” The Pope stuttered as he tried to continue.

Forcefully moving his bloody body, the Pope finally managed to stand up. If he followed the instructions of God’s Right Seat, became one of their members, and headed on towards *La Persona Superiore a Dio*, then maybe he could save even more followers. The Pope did not want to head towards such an existence for his own power and standing; he did not want to use innocent sheep as stepping stones to become Pope.

The Pope stood up. Behind him were the fates of two billion followers.

“I really am delighted.” Holding his right hand out horizontally, Fiamma laughed, “Even though it is a complete victory on my part, your overwhelming stupidity has made this so enjoyable.”

The next moment, an explosion rang out. The interaction between them could not be considered a “clash” by any stretch of the imagination.

Almost instantly, the Pope was smothered with a force so overwhelming his body was once again sent flying. The plaza of the Basilica di San Pietro was so severely damaged only rubble remained, the aftershocks of the explosion having caused all the surrounding structures to collapse. The already heavily-damaged structure of Basilica di San Pietro had incurred even more damage.

A part of the perimeter wall separating the city-state of Vatican City from the city of Rome crumbled, and the Pope was blown completely out of sight.

After such a commotion, the Vatican soldiers who firmly believed “such a Holy place would never be threatened” hastily rushed over. At first they stared blankly at Fiamma, likely not believing any human could be capable of causing such devastation. A few of them, finally regaining their senses and remembering their sworn duty, charged forward, but the next moment they became pieces of flesh dancing about in the air. With that, the victor was determined.

“Hm?”

Staring at the other side of the thoroughly destroyed wall of Vatican City, Fiamma realized: The damage was too minimal. The shock wave he emitted should have leveled several hundred meters of Roman streets outside Vatican City to rubble, but only the interior of Vatican City was damaged; everything outside it was completely unharmed.

“So you drew the entirety of my attack upon yourself? Such an impressive bastard.” Fiamma snorted and turned to face the Basilica di San Pietro, which had collapsed almost completely. He had no concern about the lowly soldiers: Even the Cardinal Bishops and other higher ups would not dare to oppose him now.

Fiamma of the Right had no intention of hiding the commotion, having caused the surroundings to look like one large disaster zone resulting from a terrorist attack.



The thoroughly bloodied Pope lay outside Vatican City.

He could hear the siren of an ambulance.

At first he thought someone had been killed somewhere nearby, but upon second look he realized the ambulance was heading towards him.

Even if he were to look around, there were no collapsed houses. Even though the flying debris had shattered the glass windows, there did not seem to be any casualties. Just as the Pope was about to smile he realized, inside a small alley between the houses, a dirty-looking girl was looking at him.

It's dangerous here. Even though he wanted to say this, he could not manage to say it properly.

Maybe it was because his consciousness was wavering, but the girl seemed to be shouting something at the Pope. She was not holding any bandages or antiseptics or the like, but the Pope, who did not like to overly rely on the power of Science, was grateful for this girl's actions. He was rather grateful to be able to receive even such small goodwill after bearing such a great malice.

He heard a new voice, “Wow, that was quite a ruckus.”

The Pope lifted his head up, to see a female clothed completely in yellow.

Vento of the Front.

“The Pope who had his honor wounded just to save the lost sheep, and that little thought just now, does he still hate to be voted by the people? The Pope who won through election.”

“... England.”

His presence was fading, but the Pope still tried to open his mouth.

As he continued vomiting blobs of blood, he said, “Fiamma’s target is England’s...”

“Don’t use such a commanding tone on me.” Vento stuck her tongue out and easily cut through his words, “But since everyone’s goal is to kill that bastard, I’ll just close one eye.”

At that moment, Vento purposely paused.

It was the dirty-looking girl. Currently, she was glaring at Vento with blatant hatred.

“Nice hostility you have there.” Vento snarled, “Your luck is rather good: If I had my original weapon, you would have died here.”

The siren of the ambulance was closing in. Vento said nothing more, and disappeared into an alley between the houses.



London, Little Venice.

The one with the highest authority within the Anglican Church, Archbishop Laura Stuart, was lying on a boat floating on an artificial sluice formed by numerous canals. From the name Venice, one could rather easily discern it was based on the city of water. However, there were some differences. This was largely because the surrounding scenery was different from Venice, and it was not a floating city. Just a pier with three canals gathered at it.

Venice had an artificial, magical effect that allowed for heavier use of the terrain and it was fully duplicated here, but very few people knew about it.

“It would be great if it were a rowboat...” Laura looked rather bored as she said this, and peeked towards the back of the boat. Even though there was a man who looks like a gondolier, a miniature engine was attached to the rear of the boat.

“Report.” The boatman brought up a topic related to work.

I finally manage to leave St. George Cathedral, and this boatman doesn't know the mood and wants to talk about work, Laura curled her lips unhappily.

“There seems to be in-fighting within the Roman Catholic Church, and the Pope himself became involved as well. It's unknown whether he's alive or dead. We have confirmed that he was sent to the hospital, but we can't make hasty conclusions.”

“ ... ”

The boatman began to hypothesize based on the insider reports from Rome and the magical flow, collating them together to explain this 'inside war' further.

“From the vast amount of magic detected, the damage should have been dozens of times -- no even more than that, but... please give me a moment to calculate this. I might have made a mistake.”

“Even if you do your calculations again, it won't change. There was an ordinary street behind where they found the Pope, yes? If so, it's extremely obvious what happened.”

Laying down on the boat, Laura flipped her body around to a position where she was unable to see the boatman. While doing this, she muttered, “...Such a kind man.”

The significance and thoughts that statement held, the boatman was unable to tell. Laura Stuart's outer appearance belied her true age. The way in which she experienced things were quite different from the way ordinary people experienced. Because of that, the boatman was unable to understand Laura Stuart's method of thinking.

“... then, you must be smiling right now you foolish, kind man.”

In the end, the boatman could only guess based on what he saw.

There was a tinge of loneliness in Laura Stuart's voice.



In a certain corner of Academy City, there existed a windowless building.

It was of such hardness not even a nuclear weapon initiated at point-blank range could destroy it. All of this had been prepared for merely one “human”.

The General Director of Academy City, Aleister Crowley.

The “human” floating upside down in the huge glass container revealed a smile.

He was looking at a rectangular screen directly shown in the air. The sources of information were coming from the Underline, a unique network of nanomachines scattered throughout Academy City.

The screen that normally displayed information now showed only gray mosaics, because the giant explosion caused by Acqua of the Back had forced the Underline network to collapse within an hour. Even if they were to create the nanomachines with the most advanced nanotechnology, the motherboard length was only about seventy nanometers. It was only natural they would be destroyed by a large enough storm or impact.

Interference within one area would quickly spread throughout the entire network, burdening the system into a crash. It would take a few hours to repair it, and to Aleister, such a wait should be like having his hand cut off. The only emotion he showed was a calm smile.

“As expected, I need to think of a way to settle that problem...”

However, he looked delighted, for he just remembered something he had to do.

The machines surrounding Aleister analyzed the information collected before the Underline had been disabled, filtering the useful information from the useless. The gray screen began to regain color, and immediately displayed itself as a report.

The contents of the report were an analysis of the power possessed by the right hand of a certain boy.

Chemical formulas of every variety jumped about the screen, from the brain processing capability calculated from the amount of oxygen taken in and the amount of carbon dioxide given out, to the power of his right hand calculated from the AIM diffusion fields scattered throughout Academy City.

In and out, this was a world filled with science.

Aleister used his eyes to track the words scrolling down the screen, and his smile became even deeper.

An adult, and yet a child; a man, and yet a woman; a saint, and yet a sinner. In front of the ‘human’ who possessed all of these attributes, the report was as follows:

- The reference point for the denial of illogical phenomena (Point Central o) remains at stability level 3.
- Regulated rotation speed of the core continuing to idle at the center confirmed.
- Sample name “Imagine Breaker” at 98% plan influence level.
- Along with Academy City’s #1, it is properly operating as a linchpin to the main plan.

AFTERWORD

To the readers who bought the books one by one, it's been a while.

To the readers who managed to read through all 17 volumes at one go, we meet for the first time.

I'm Kamachi Kazuma.

Also in this afterword, I guess sooner or later, it's more or less going to be my 20th time doing this soon. I added a bit of all the good things as if it was customary, and this time, it felt rather out of place.

The topic this time is about the 'chosen ones'. One of the occult keywords is the term 'Saints'. The 'Divine Mother Worship' is the underlying difference in foundation between this battle between Saint and Saint.

For the 'Saint Destroyer' spell that Itsuwa (and the rest of the Amakusa members) used, one has to go back to Volume 9 to understand the concept behind this. When the Saint Kanzaki suddenly returns to drastically change things as the Priestess-sama and Tatemiya acting as the strategist, they were able to win this battle.

This volume has a lot of information that relates to the core of this story. It'll be interesting to recollect the hints here. Where did I put the hints in this story, and where does the information overlap? Once you find that out, perhaps you'll grasp a small part of what will happen in the future.

Thank you as always to my in charge, Miki-san, and illustrator, Haimura-san. I really regret that there were a lot of unexpected things happening, and I sincerely thank you two very much.

And I'll like to thank all the readers as well. As I continued to tumble back and forth behind the scenes, I thank you readers very much for bearing with me all the way till now.

And now, this volume ends here.

I hope you'll continue to read the next volume.

At this moment, let me sign off first.

It feels that Itsuwa's becoming less and less like an ordinary girl.

-Kamachi Kazuma